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ADVICE

What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter?

By *Gabriela Montell* | MARCH 27, 2003

Since last fall, Peter J. Alaimo has applied for 25 academic positions -- all of them at four-year colleges and universities. In every instance, he's been asked to submit a statement explaining his philosophy of teaching.

"I don't think I saw an ad that didn't ask for one," says Mr. Alaimo, a postdoctoral fellow of chemical biology at the University of California at San Francisco.

At a growing number of institutions, departments are asking job candidates to include statements of teaching philosophy in their application packets. But many applicants say they feel at sea when they try to write one. And members of hiring committees say the statements are merely a way to send a message about the importance of teaching but are rarely a deciding, or even serious, factor in the hiring process.

If they are a deciding factor, the statements are more likely to hurt a candidacy than to help it. "It's not only a job-application hoop to jump through," says Bill Pannacker, an assistant professor of English at Hope College in Michigan. "but another potential stumbling block. Someone on the hiring committee could use the document to weed you out of the competition over some philosophical issue that may have no real bearing on the kind of teaching you do."

Candidates have no way of knowing how their statements will be used in the hiring process; for them, the main difficulty is just writing one. "It was definitely the hardest part of the application for me to put together," says Megan Frost, a Ph.D. candidate in chemistry at the University of Michigan who is on the academic job market. (For advice on how to write a teaching statement, and a list of dos and don'ts, [click here.](#))

Most Ph.D.'s are produced by research universities, but most academic job openings are at teaching-oriented institutions, says Gene C. Fant Jr., chairman of the English department at Union University. That disjuncture is driving search committees at many institutions -- especially liberal-arts colleges, comprehensive state universities, evangelical colleges, and community colleges -- to ask applicants for their philosophy on teaching.

He finds the statements useful in the search. "Some employers have had really bad experiences with people who are good researchers and lousy teachers," Mr. Fant says. Statements of teaching philosophy provide a way to weed out people who aren't committed to teaching or who are only interested in working at a four-year university or community college because they didn't get a job at a Research I, he says.

"We had a couple of searches last year [at Mississippi College], and it was one of the things we really looked at," says Mr. Fant, who was chairman of the English department there at the time. "We threw out the applications that lacked good statements, and then, when we had our finalists, we really pored over their teaching philosophies. We actually had them on the table in front of us when we were interviewing candidates, and we asked them questions based on their statements."

At small, private, liberal-arts colleges, such statements are more likely to make or break someone's candidacy, says Andrew Green, a Ph.D. counselor in the Career Center at the University of California at Berkeley. "The major selling point of those colleges is that students will be taught by cutting-edge professionals in an intimate setting, rather than in a lecture hall where they're one of hundreds of students."

But not every institution takes these teaching statements so seriously.

"I can't think of a single time when we used a teaching philosophy to rule somebody out," says Brian Wilson, chairman of the department of comparative religion at Western Michigan University. "Western is very interested in building its graduate programs and retaining its Carnegie status as a research-intensive university, so the ethos here is really

that research and writing are probably the most important things a person brings. Teaching is a close second, and nobody discounts that, but if we see potential for teaching, then we think this is a person who can be nurtured and taught."

Even at colleges that rely heavily on the statements, some academics are skeptical of their value.

Michael Westmoreland, an associate professor of mathematics at Ohio's Denison University, doesn't think they are a good tool for diagnosing the teaching potential of applicants. "If it were up to me, I wouldn't ask for statements of teaching philosophy, because I've yet to have an experience in which a statement gave me any information, unlike other things in the packet," he says.

The problem, some professors say, is there's an absence of criteria about what constitutes a good teaching statement, not to mention good teaching. In fact, few professors were able to give concrete examples of what they considered a bad statement, but most said they knew one when they saw it.

"I'm not so sure we really know what we're looking for when we ask for teaching philosophies," says Joanna Bosse, an assistant professor of ethnomusicology at Bowdoin College. "I certainly struggled with mine. In fact I don't think I've ever succeeded in writing a very good statement of teaching philosophy. The job that I got was one that I didn't have to write one for, so that may be indicative of the kind of larger problem with it."

You can tell that someone is a good researcher if they have an established research record, but it's much harder to evaluate them as a teacher until you've seen them in action, says Richard Lundgren, a professor of mathematics at the University of Colorado at Denver. "Teaching excellence requires more than reflecting on what it takes to be a good teacher. You really won't know how good a teacher they are until you hire them and see how it goes at your particular institution with the mix of students that you have."

So do critics see any value to these statements? Mr. Lundgren says requiring applicants to write them does send a signal about the importance of teaching. "It's a gesture to say that we value teaching," agrees Mr. Pannacker of Hope College. "But it's not only for the

candidate. I think it's internally as well, so that the faculty who are primarily teaching faculty, rather than research faculty, feel validated and included in the hiring process."

To Mr. Westmoreland, a candidate's teaching statement is really just an indication of whether he or she is thinking seriously about the teaching aspects of the job.

Some professors argue that asking job applicants to produce teaching philosophies is premature. Young Ph.D.'s, fresh from the research-intensive training of their doctoral programs, may be least prepared to write cogently on their philosophy about teaching.

"I find it a puzzling thing to ask a beginner to produce," says Deborah Ball, a professor of education at the University of Michigan. "As a veteran elementary teacher, I would have to work hard to try to represent what I think and try to do, but I cannot really see how the beginning teachers with whom I work could do this well yet."

Ms. Bosse agrees. It makes more sense to use a statement of teaching philosophy in the tenure process, because "at that point you're in a particular job with a certain kind of student body and a certain set of goals that are tailored to individuals, so you have a specific context in which to discuss your teaching."

In fact, teaching statements are becoming a common component in the dossiers of junior professors up for promotion. Barbara Bowers, a professor of nursing and chairwoman of the social-studies divisional committee at the University of Wisconsin at Madison says her committee requires them.

"We view it as a tool to encourage faculty members to improve their teaching early in their careers," she says. "We used to think people were born good teachers -- you either are or you aren't -- and we know now that's not true. People can learn to be good teachers. So the purpose of the teaching statement is to be self-reflective, to identify where you might need some help from others, or you might need to do a little more work on your own to improve, and to look at which of your strategies are effective and which ones aren't."

Where job candidates typically write a page-long statement, at the tenure level, the document is longer -- perhaps three to five pages or more. It serves as an abstract that's going to have evidence -- sample examinations, syllabi, course evaluations -- appended to it, says Brian Coppola, a chemistry professor at the University of Michigan. "It's really a Rosetta Stone for the dossier that's being presented" related to teaching.

For example, it may help the committee to put a candidate's course evaluations into context. "We realize that it's nice for teachers to get good reviews from students, but, in fact, sometimes teachers who get mixed reviews may actually be better teachers," says Ms. Bowers. "Maybe they're less entertaining, but a bit more demanding. Reviewing a candidate's statement of teaching philosophy may help us to see what's really happening."

However, many professors say that a teaching statement is unlikely to make or break a faculty member's tenure case. "There are so many other factors to consider," says Mr. Pannapacker of Hope College. "I think a teaching statement is pretty low down on the scale. There's your publications record, student-teacher evaluations, annual reports from department chairs, and they're likely to weigh much more heavily." By contrast, in the hiring process, he says, the statement might be more influential because "there's less material to look at. The teaching statement is one out of maybe 10 pages or so of material, whereas a tenure candidate's dossier is as thick as a book."

Like many job candidates, Mr. Alaimo of UCSF has mixed feelings about statements of teaching philosophy. He's been on 10 interviews so far, and he believes he wouldn't have landed them if not for his teaching statement, which he worked on for two months. "Coming from a major research institution, I don't think I would have gotten the interviews at four-year colleges had I not had what I hope is a pretty good statement of teaching philosophy." Even so, he says the next time around he'll spend less time on his statement and more time on things that are more likely to be pivotal in the hiring process: "I have the sense that the teaching philosophy is sort of this wishy-washy document, and it's really not clear how anyone uses it."

Academics may disagree on the importance of teaching statements, but they agree on one thing: Even if you're not asked for such a statement in the hiring process, you should write one.

"It's worth having," says UC-Berkeley's Mr. Green, even if it isn't pivotal in a search. At some point in the job-search or tenure process, he adds, "the issue of what you do in the classroom is going to come to the fore, and you need to be prepared to discuss it in a coherent manner."

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By Mary Anne Lewis

Drop the abstract description and make your statement of teaching philosophy a window into your classroom style.

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WRITING A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY FOR THE ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH

Chris O'Neal, Deborah Meizlish, and Matthew Kaplan

*Domestic Environmental Policy and Politics. Lehigh University's year-old Environmental Initiative seeks an Assistant Professor for a tenure track position... To apply, please send a cover letter, current curriculum vitae, syllabi and other evidence of teaching style and effectiveness, a **statement of teaching philosophy**, a sample of scholarship (if available) and three letters of reference.*

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*LSU's Department of Chemistry (chemistry.lsu.edu) anticipates filling one or two tenure-track positions in the fields of NMR Spectroscopy (Ref: Log #0184) and Physical Chemistry (Ref: Log #0186), broadly defined.... Applications should consist of a research proposal, a **statement of teaching philosophy**, and a curriculum vitae (including address). Applicants should arrange for submission of three letters of recommendation.*

Introduction

As these recent job ads illustrate, requests for teaching philosophies are common in the academic market. In fact, a survey of 457 search committee chairs in six disciplines (English, history, political science, psychology, biology, and chemistry) found that 57% requested a teaching statement at some point in a job search (Meizlish & Kaplan, in press). These results differed slightly by institutional type, with master's and bachelor's institutions requesting them more often than doctoral institutions. Results also differed by discipline. Surprisingly, requests for teaching philosophies were most frequent in the natural sciences. But the overall message is clear: job applicants in all fields may be asked to submit a teaching philosophy (see also Bruff, in press; Montell, 2003; Schönwetter, Taylor, & Ellis, 2006).

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Teaching philosophies can serve several purposes (e.g., self-reflection, introduction to a teaching portfolio, communication with students), but we focus here on those written for academic job applications. Such statements communicate a job candidate's approach to teaching and learning to a faculty considering whether to make that candidate one of their colleagues. Since a committee cannot possibly observe the teaching of every applicant, the teaching philosophy helps search committee members imagine themselves in each candidate's classroom. What is it like to be one of this instructor's students? Why does she make the pedagogical decisions she does? As a student in this classroom, how would I spend my fifty minutes on a given day? How does the instructor address the challenges and resources of teaching in his particular discipline? Does her teaching style complement our department's philosophy of instruction?

This Occasional Paper is designed to help experienced graduate students write a statement of teaching philosophy. The paper contains four sections. First, we offer suggestions for making a philosophy of teaching explicit and getting it on paper. Second, we discuss research on characteristics of effective statements. Third, we introduce a rubric that can guide the development and crafting of a teaching statement that search committees will value. Finally, we address questions that job candidates often raise about this sometimes perplexing document.

Advice for Getting Started

Just because you have never written a statement of your teaching philosophy does not mean you do not have a philosophy. If you engage a group of learners who are your responsibility, then your behavior in designing their learning environment must follow from your philosophical orientation.... What you need to do is discover what [your philosophy] is and then make it explicit. (Coppola, 2000, p. 1)

Figure 1. Some general guidelines for writing the teaching philosophy (adapted from Chism, 1998):

- **Keep it brief (1–2 pages).**
- **Use a narrative, first person approach.**
- **Make it reflective and personal.**
- **Discuss your goals for your students, the methods you use to achieve those goals, and the assessments you use to find out if students have met your expectations.**
- **Explain your specific disciplinary context and use specific examples of your practice.**
- **Showcase your strengths and accomplishments.**

Beginning the teaching philosophy is often the hardest part of writing one. The motivations behind the decisions we make in the classroom can be surprisingly elusive when we try to put them on paper. Since there is no single approach that will work for all writers, we offer three strategies for getting started:

1. Goodyear and Allchin (1998) found that thinking about the “big” questions of teaching helped instructors articulate their philosophies:
 - What motivates me to learn about this subject?
 - What do I expect to be the outcomes of my teaching?
 - How do I know when I've taught successfully?
2. In workshops and seminars at U-M, we have found that some graduate students prefer to approach a statement by thinking about more concrete and manageable “fragments” of teaching that can then be assembled into a holistic essay. The following questions are designed to get you started:
 - Why do you teach?
 - What do you believe or value about teaching and student learning?
 - If you had to choose a metaphor for teaching/learning, what would it be?
 - How do your research and disciplinary context influence your teaching?
 - How do your identity/background and your students' identities/backgrounds affect teaching and learning in your classes?
 - How do you utilize multiple pedagogical approaches in your teaching?
 - What is your approach to evaluating and assessing students?
3. Finally, some instructors find it most useful to begin by simply looking at examples of others' philosophies. CRLT has posted sample statements from a variety of disciplines at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum.html>. When looking at others' philosophies, you will likely note considerable variation, both in terms of content and format, and you will likely find some approaches that resonate with you. While there is no single approach to a teaching philosophy, Figure 1 provides some general guidelines for those statements written for the academic job market.

Once you've articulated a first draft, you can begin shaping and polishing it for the search committees who will be reading it. In the following section, we discuss characteristics of successful teaching philosophy statements and provide a rubric for evaluating a teaching statement and aiming it at the right audience.

What Constitutes a Good Statement?

In their survey of search committee chairs, Meizlish and Kaplan (in press) found broad agreement on the desirable characteristics of a statement of teaching philosophy. Specifically, chairs described successful teaching statements as having the following characteristics:

- *They offer evidence of practice.* Search committee chairs want to understand how candidates enact their teaching philosophies. In particular, they want to see specific and personal examples and experiences rather than vague references to educational jargon or formulaic statements.
- *They convey reflectiveness.* Search committees want to know that a candidate is a thoughtful instructor. They are interested in candidates who can discuss their approach to instructional challenges and their plans for future pedagogical development.
- *They communicate that teaching is valued.* Search chairs appreciate a tone or language that conveys a candidate's enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. They are wary of candidates who talk about teaching as a burden or a requirement that is less important than research.
- *They are student- or learning-centered, attuned to differences in student abilities, background knowledge, or levels.* Search committee chairs want concrete evidence of a candidate's attentiveness to student learning (rather than just content) and awareness of and ability to deal with student differences in the classroom.
- *They are well written, clear, and readable.* Search chairs draw conclusions about candidates from all elements of the application packet. Candidates can be undermined by carelessness in their teaching statements.

A Rubric to Evaluate the Teaching Philosophy

Based on survey responses from search committee chairs, our own experience reading hundreds of teaching philosophies, and research on best practices in teaching and learning, we constructed a rubric to help graduate students write and evaluate statements of teaching philosophy (Figure 2). The rubric can be used as a starting point for revising first drafts of your philosophy. The rubric consists of the following five categories:

1. Goals for student learning
2. Enactment of goals
3. Assessment of goals
4. Creating an inclusive learning environment
5. Structure, rhetoric, and language

The first three categories of the rubric were purposefully framed to encourage instructors to think about the alignment of their goals, methods, and assessments. Research suggests that aligning intended outcomes (goals), instructional methods, and testing can lead to significant gains in student learning. Instructional alignment is more important for tasks involving higher-order thinking skills, and it has a particularly strong impact on the performance of lower aptitude students (Cohen, 1987).

In terms of writing a teaching statement, focusing on alignment raises a number of useful questions about your approach to teaching and student learning: What do you want students to learn (and why)? What approach will you take to help students acquire the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and how can you best test students to determine whether they have reached these goals? Reflecting on these issues in a systematic fashion allows you to develop a clear sense of why you take the approach you do, often one of the most difficult aspects of writing a teaching statement. It also has the potential to reveal areas of misalignment, providing clear direction for future development and ensuring that the teaching statement is not merely a rhetorical exercise, but a useful contribution to your development as a teacher.

The fourth category reflects our belief that pedagogical practices that reach students at the margins of the classroom are beneficial for all students. As Kardia (1998) writes,

Attention to race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other student characteristics is consistent

with an improved learning environment for all students. For example, an instructor who provides more lead time with assignments in response to the needs of a student with a physical disability will be appreciated by all students, even though the majority of the students might have been able to find ways to compensate for the lack of lead time. (p. 19)

Research has confirmed the benefits of diversity for promoting student learning and development. For example, studies conducted at U-M on the impact of racial diversity on student learning and attitudes confirm that positive classroom interactions across racial difference can lead to increased student motivation, critical thinking skills, and social engagement. Obviously, it is up to faculty to create positive learning experiences in order to take advantage of diversity. "Students, indeed, acquire a very broad range of skills, motivations, values, and cognitive capacities from diverse peers when provided with the appropriate opportunities to do so" (Gurin, 1999, Conclusion). Future faculty need to demonstrate that they have thought carefully about these issues.

The last category addresses some of the most common complaints search committee chairs voiced about teaching statements. Chairs complained about teaching jargon that alienates many readers and weak thematic structures that make reading difficult. Obviously, search committees are more likely to have a positive view of a well-written teaching philosophy than a poorly written one.

A common component running through all of these categories is a focus on specificity, disciplinary context, and rich, illustrative examples. The importance of this component is based on the finding that search committees want to read about specific examples of how candidates enact their teaching philosophies. What does this mean in practice? Rather than saying, "I use active learning in my teaching," write about a *specific* exercise you use in your class that engages students actively. Why do you use it? How were students different after the activity? Thinking about your students, what do they typically find most challenging about that activity? How do you know that the activity worked?

Below we provide excerpts from teaching philosophies written by U-M graduate students that exemplify each of the rubric's first four categories (the fifth, by necessity, is illustrated by each example).

Goals for student learning

At the heart of most teaching philosophies is a set of goals for what an instructor hopes to accomplish in the classroom. An instructor's goals should describe how students will be different after leaving that instructor's class. What will they be capable of doing that they could not before? What will they know that they did not before? How will they see the world differently? Goals in a teaching philosophy should be clearly written to describe the ways students will develop, as well as to convey the context of the instructor's discipline.

In this description of goals, a social work graduate student instructor (GSI) talks about the transformative nature of social work education. Her goals for her students are lifelong and directly tied to the mission of social work as a discipline. Note the specificity of the skills she hopes students will attain.

Social work education should foster students' critical consciousness – the ability "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against those oppressive elements" (Freire)... Through creative and interactive activities in and outside of my classroom, students learn to recognize, analyze, and work to change dynamics of privilege and oppression when engaging with others in all areas of practice – individual, group, community, or state.

Enactment and assessment of goals

A teaching philosophy cannot rest solely on an instructor's learning goals. For it to be useful in the job search, it must also communicate how instructors will achieve those goals, and how they will know that they have achieved them. Specificity is compelling when talking about teaching methods and assessments. Likewise, the more closely the methods and assessments are grounded in disciplinary pedagogies, the more they will resonate with readers in that field. The first example below describes the teaching methods used by a GSI in Germanic Languages and Literatures. The second describes how an electrical engineering GSI assesses student learning.

While confronting my students with the challenge of learning new languages and cultures, I encourage them to reflect on their own beliefs and try to open their minds to new ways of seeing things. For example, in my

fourth-semester German class that focused on the lives of and work of the Brothers Grimm, we often engaged in discussion of original, European fairy tales, comparing them to their well-known Disney versions. Such comparisons helped my students not only to learn about important aspects of German literature, but also encouraged them to step back and reflect on the values of their own culture.

In order to solve new problems, engineers should be able to think through them. The final solution to a problem is rarely obvious and, as such, the thinking process must be developed and refined with practice. In a term, I assign several individual and group projects that incorporate multiple ideas and first principles. Projects early in a term are broken down with milestones such that students can begin to learn how to approach a multifaceted problem on their own.... In addition to projects, students use their critical thinking skills on a more regular basis during weekly timed quizzes. The quizzes are not designed to test memorization...rather, they are designed to test problem solving, as each quiz cannot be completed if not approached properly.

Creating an inclusive learning environment

This category emphasizes the integration of inclusive teaching and learning throughout the statement, thereby avoiding the isolated “diversity paragraph.” In the following quotations, the authors connect inclusive teaching to their goals for their courses and their understandings of their disciplines.

Parallel to the idea of discovering new things as an engineer is the idea of discovering new minds and cultures. Similarly, learning analytical and evaluation skills as an engineer parallels learning to understand and/or tolerate other points of view.... In my classes I try to expose the students to different situations to help them gain these skills, including interacting with classmates with different backgrounds (race, ethnicity, gender, technical knowledge...), taking different roles when working in teams (leader, note taker, report writer, etc.), and taking different roles when working individually (presenter or evaluator). By doing so, I hope to provide the students the opportunity to learn not only the theory of mechanical engineering and

problem solving skills, but also to realize that around them there is much to learn as well. (GSI in Mechanical Engineering)

My ideal classroom is primarily a safe and comfortable place where students of diverse background and experience are encouraged to clarify their thoughts and expose their assumptions...for mutual examination.... On whichever level I teach, I intend that my courses are enriching to my students of diverse background in various ways that will suit their particular academic and personal needs. Specifically, through the activities discussed above, I hope that those students of general North American cultural background broaden their intellectual and spiritual horizon by critically reflecting upon their own cultural assumptions and beliefs, and the students of Asian ancestry who are curious about their own philosophical and religious traditions can enrich themselves by learning more about their roots. (GSI in Asian Languages and Culture)

A statement need not achieve a rating of “excellent” in each of the categories described in the rubric to be a good teaching statement. We encourage you to seek input on your teaching statement in much the same way you would solicit feedback on a scholarly paper. Faculty in your department can provide feedback based on their own experience serving on search committees and reading application materials. Keep in mind, however, that the qualities that serve a job candidate well at U-M may not match those at a different institution. For a different perspective, you might ask for feedback from peers in your program who have graduated and are now faculty elsewhere or from mentors at your undergraduate institution.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to write a new teaching philosophy for every school?

An individual's core teaching philosophy probably will not change based on the school to which he or she is applying for a position. That said, search committees are attentive to the match or mismatch between the priorities of their institution or department and the priorities implied by a job candidate's teaching statement and other application materials. It is worth considering the range of positions to

which you are applying and thinking carefully about whether some degree of customization (based on institutional type, focus of the position, etc.) is appropriate.

2. *What should I do if I don't have a lot of teaching experience upon which to base my statement of teaching philosophy?*

This is not an uncommon situation, particularly in some disciplines where teaching opportunities for graduates are rare. Regardless of your experience as an instructor, you have years of experience as a student in your discipline that you can draw from. Additionally, you may have some experience mentoring students in the lab, independent study, or elsewhere. Talk about your approach to teaching in these settings and the lessons you would take to your own classroom.

3. *Can sending an unsolicited teaching philosophy hurt me when I'm applying for faculty positions?*

Meizlish and Kaplan asked search committees this very question. The conclusion was clear: submitting an unsolicited teaching statement is viewed positively by most search committee chairs.

4. *Should I reference or include student ratings and comments?*

A teaching statement is a brief overview of your approach to teaching supported by rich examples drawn from your practice. As a result, support materials such as student ratings and comments would be out of place in a teaching statement. Consider instead constructing a teaching portfolio to highlight these materials. Teaching portfolios are organized, annotated collections of the "evidence" that supports your philosophy. They can include student evaluations, samples of assignments, letters of recommendation, samples of student work, etc. Note that teaching portfolios are rarely requested by search committees. For more information, see CRLT Occasional Paper No. 11, *The Teaching Portfolio* (available at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/resources/occasional>).

5. *Are teaching philosophies original work? Couldn't I adopt someone else's philosophy if I completely agree with what they're saying?*

Teaching philosophies are original work, just like anything else you or someone else writes. Copying others' philosophies is plagiarism. Besides, a well-written philosophy should be rooted in your own practice and illuminated by specific examples from your own work. No one else has had exactly your experiences in the classroom.

6. *Will this be the last time I write a teaching philosophy?*

Teaching philosophies are becoming a common component of tenure and promotion packages at colleges and universities. If you continue in academia as a tenured or untenured faculty member, a teaching statement will likely be one of the ways in which your performance is assessed. Fortunately, having written one for the job search, you will have a head start. Remember, however, that the teaching philosophy is an evolving document, changing as you gain more experience as a teacher and your beliefs about effective teaching and learning evolve. Returning to the teaching philosophy statement throughout your career is a useful reflective exercise that can help to make your current teaching practice more explicit and deliberate.

7. *Where can I learn more about teaching philosophies?*

The CRLT Teaching Strategies website contains a section on teaching statements (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpts.html>) with useful articles and sample statements from a variety of disciplines. CRLT offers workshops on writing teaching statements at a one-day Preparing Future Faculty Conference each fall. Graduate students interested in a more intensive experience can apply to participate in a month-long Preparing Future Faculty Seminar that is co-sponsored by Rackham and offered every May. (See <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/pff.html> for more information about these programs.) CRLT's Graduate Teaching Consultants are also available to consult one-on-one about teaching philosophies. You can contact CRLT (764-0505, crlt@umich.edu) to set up a consultation.

Figure 2. Rubric for composing and evaluating a statement of teaching philosophy

Categories	Excellent	Needs Some Revision	Unsatisfactory
<p>Goals for student learning: What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline? What are you preparing students for? What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?</p> <p>Enactment of goals (teaching methods): What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods contribute to your goals for students? Why are these methods appropriate for use in your discipline?</p>	<p>Goals are clearly articulated, specific, and go beyond knowledge level, including skills, attitudes, career goals, etc. Goals are sensitive to the context of the instructor's discipline. They are concise, not exhaustive.</p> <p>Enactment of goals is specific and thoughtful. Includes details and rationale for teaching methods. The methods are clearly connected to specific goals and are appropriate for those goals. Specific examples of the methods in use within the disciplinary context are given.</p>	<p>Goals are articulated but may be too broad or not specific to the discipline. Goals focus on basic knowledge, ignoring skills acquisition and affective change.</p> <p>Description of teaching methods not clearly connected to goals, or if connected, not well developed (seems like a list of what is done in the classroom). Methods are described, but generically; no example of the instructor's use of the methods within the discipline is communicated.</p>	<p>Articulation of goals is unfocused, incomplete, or missing.</p> <p>Enactment of goals is not articulated. If there is an attempt at articulating teaching methods, it is basic and unreflective.</p>
<p>Assessment of goals (measuring student learning): How do you know your goals for students are being met? What sorts of assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why? How do assessments contribute to student learning? How do assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?</p>	<p>Specific examples of assessment tools are clearly described. Assessment tools are aligned with teaching goals and teaching methods. Assessments reinforce the priorities and context of the discipline both in content and type.</p>	<p>Assessments are described, but not connected to goals and teaching methods. Description is too general, with no reference to the motivation behind the assessments. There is no clear connection between the assessments and the priorities of the discipline.</p>	<p>Assessment of goals is not articulated or mentioned only in passing.</p>
<p>Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of the following questions: How do your own and your students' identities (e.g., race, gender, class), backgrounds, experiences, and levels of privilege affect the classroom? How do you use multiple teaching approaches? How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?</p>	<p>Portrays a coherent philosophy of inclusive education that is integrated throughout the statement. Makes space for diverse ways of knowing and/or teaching approaches. Discussion of roles is sensitive to historically underrepresented students. Demonstrates awareness of issues of equity within the discipline.</p>	<p>Inclusive teaching is addressed but in a cursory manner or in a way that isolates it from the rest of the philosophy. Author briefly connects identity issues to aspects of his/her teaching.</p>	<p>Issues of inclusion are not addressed or addressed in an awkward manner. There is no connection to teaching practices.</p>
<p>Structure, rhetoric and language: How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structured?</p>	<p>The statement has a guiding structure and/or theme that engages the reader and organizes the goals, methods, and assessments articulated in the statement. Jargon is avoided and teaching terms (e.g., critical thinking) are given specific definitions that apply to the instructor's disciplinary context. Grammar and spelling are correct.</p>	<p>The statement has a structure and/or theme that is not connected to the ideas actually discussed in the statement, or, organizing structure is weak and does not resonate within the disciplinary context. The statement contains some jargon.</p>	<p>No overall structure present. Statement is a collection of disconnected statements about teaching. Jargon is used liberally and not supported by specific definitions or examples. Needs much revision.</p>

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Teaching Statements

Print Version (<https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2010/06/11113554/Teaching-Statements.docx>)

- [What is a teaching statement?](#)
- [What purposes does the teaching statement serve?](#)
- [What does a teaching statement include?](#)
- [General Guidelines](#)
- [Reflection questions to help get you started](#)
- [Exercises to help get you started](#)
- [Evaluating your teaching statement](#)
- [Further resources](#)

What is a Teaching Statement?

A Teaching Statement is a purposeful and reflective essay about the author's teaching beliefs and practices. It is an individual narrative that includes not only one's beliefs about the teaching and learning process, but also concrete examples of the ways in which he or she enacts these beliefs in the classroom. At its best, a Teaching Statement gives a clear and unique portrait of the author as a teacher, avoiding generic or empty philosophical statements about teaching.

What Purposes does the Teaching Statement Serve?

The Teaching Statement can be used for personal, professional, or pedagogical purposes. While Teaching Statements are becoming an increasingly important part of the hiring and tenure processes, they are also effective exercises in helping one clearly and coherently conceptualize his or her approaches to and experiences of teaching and learning. As [Nancy Van Note Chism](http://education.indiana.edu/dotnetforms/Profile.aspx?u=nchism) (<http://education.indiana.edu/dotnetforms/Profile.aspx?u=nchism>),

Professor Emerita of Education at IUPUI observes, “The act of taking time to consider one’s goals, actions, and vision provides an opportunity for development that can be personally and professionally enriching. Reviewing and revising former statements of teaching philosophy can help teachers to reflect on their growth and renew their dedication to the goals and values that they hold.”

What does a Teaching Statement Include?

A Teaching Statement can address any or all of the following:

- *Your* conception of how learning occurs
- A description of how *your* teaching facilitates student learning
- A reflection of *why you* teach the way you do
- The goals *you* have for yourself and for your students
- How *your* teaching enacts your beliefs and goals
- What, for *you*, constitutes evidence of student learning
- The ways in which *you* create an inclusive learning environment
- *Your* interests in new techniques, activities, and types of learning

“If at all possible, your statement should enable the reader to imagine you in the classroom, teaching. You want to include sufficient information for picturing not only you in the process of teaching, but also your class in the process of learning.” – Helen G. Grundman, *Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement* (<http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf>)

General Guidelines

- Make your Teaching Statement **brief** and **well written**. While Teaching Statements are probably longer at the tenure level (i.e. 3-5 pages or more), for hiring purposes they are typically **1-2 pages** in length.
- Use **narrative, first-person** approach. This allows the Teaching Statement to be both personal and reflective.
- Be **sincere** and unique. Avoid clichés, especially ones about how much passion you have for teaching.
- Make it **specific** rather than abstract. Ground your ideas in **1-2 concrete examples**, whether experienced or anticipated. This will help the reader to better visualize you in the classroom.

- Be **discipline specific**. Do not ignore your research. Explain how you advance your field through teaching.
- **Avoid jargon** and technical terms, as they can be off-putting to some readers. Try not to simply repeat what is in your CV. Teaching Statements are not exhaustive documents and should be used to complement other materials for the hiring or tenure processes.
- Be **humble**. Mention students in an enthusiastic, not condescending way, and illustrate your willingness to learn from your students and colleagues.
- **Revise**. Teaching is an evolving, reflective process, and Teaching Statements can be adapted and changed as necessary.

Reflection 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.*

Exercises to Help You Get You Started:*

- [The Teaching Portfolio \(http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/academic-careers/landing-an-academic-job/teaching-portfolio\)](http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/academic-careers/landing-an-academic-job/teaching-portfolio), including a section on teaching statements, Duquesne University Center for Teaching Excellence. *This website includes **five** effective exercises to help you begin the writing process*

- [Teaching Goals Inventory \(http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xml?db=tgi_data&lay=Layout01&-view\)](http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xml?db=tgi_data&lay=Layout01&-view), by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross and their book *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. This “quiz” helps you to identify or create your teaching and learning goals.

*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.

Evaluating Your Teaching Statement

[Writing A Statement Of Teaching Philosophy For The Academic Job Search \(http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no23.pdf\)](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no23.pdf), (opens as a PDF), The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan.

This report includes a useful rubric for evaluating teaching philosophy statements. The design of the rubric was informed by experience with hundreds of teaching philosophies, as well as surveys of search committees on what they considered successful and unsuccessful components of job applicants’ teaching philosophies.

Further Resources:

General Information on and Guidelines for Writing Teaching Statements

- [Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement \(http://ucart.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio/philosophy\)](http://ucart.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio/philosophy), Faculty and TA Development at The Ohio State University. *This site provides an in-depth guide to teaching statements, including the definition of and purposes for a teaching statement, general formatting suggestions, and a self-reflective guide to writing a teaching statement.*
- [Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement \(http://www.celt.iastate.edu/faculty/document-your-teaching/writing-a-teaching-philosophy-statement\)](http://www.celt.iastate.edu/faculty/document-your-teaching/writing-a-teaching-philosophy-statement), Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Iowa State University. *This document looks at four major components of a teaching statement, which have been divided into questions—specifically, to what end? By what means? To what degree? And why? Each question is sufficiently elaborated, offering a sort of scaffolding for preparing one’s own teaching statement.*

- [Writing a Meaningful Statement of Teaching Philosophy](https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/node/1486) (<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/node/1486>), McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning at Princeton University. *This website offers strategies for preparing and formatting your teaching statement.*

Articles about Teaching Statements

- Grundman, Helen (2006). [Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement](http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf) (<http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf>) (opens as a PDF), *Notices of the AMS*, Vol. 53, No. 11, p. 1329.
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- Montell, Gabriela (2003). [What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter?](http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Your-Philosophy-on-T/45132/) (<http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Your-Philosophy-on-T/45132/>), from the Chronicle Manage Your Career section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.



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Teaching Guides

The CFT has prepared guides to a variety of teaching topics with summaries of best practices, links to other online resources, and information about local Vanderbilt resources.

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Developing a Teaching Statement

A Workshop for Graduate Students and Post-docs

Karen Freisem, kfreisem@uw.edu
Center for Teaching and Learning, 100 Gerberding
<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/>

Guiding Questions:

1. What is a teaching statement / teaching philosophy?

A teaching statement/philosophy:

- Is a short statement about teaching and learning (1-2 pages, single-spaced).
- Explains HOW you teach, and WHY you choose to teach that way.
- Paints a picture, helps the reader “see” you teaching.
- Is reflective and personal. Narrative, first person.
- Does not include references, avoids jargon.
- Is discipline-specific and takes into account type of institution/position.
- Is self-explanatory, capable of standing alone. If you’re in a field where teaching portfolios are the norm, the teaching statement is the centerpiece of the teaching portfolio.
- Is what you’d want to talk about and/or expand on in an interview.

2. What do search committees look for in teaching statements?

- a. *Goals for student learning:*
What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline?
What are you preparing students for? What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?
- b. *Enactment of goals (teaching methods):*
What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods contribute to your goals for students?
Why are these methods appropriate for use in your discipline?
- c. *Assessment of goals (measuring student learning):*
How do you know your goals for students are being met? What sorts of assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why? How do assessments contribute to student learning? How do assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?
- d. *Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of following questions:*
How do your own and your students’ identities (e.g., race, gender, class), background, experience, and levels of privilege affect the classroom? How do you account for diverse learning preferences? How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?
- e. *Structure, rhetoric and language:*
How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structured?

From – “Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy for the Academic Job Search” by C. O’Neal, D. Meizlish, & M. Kaplan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_no23.pdf
Note: CRLT has many example teaching statements online at – <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum.php>

3. How can you get started on your teaching statement?

- a. *Brainstorm*: What kinds of teaching experience do you have?
- b. *Try some freewriting*: “Freewriting” means to write for a limited amount of time without stopping, without editing, and, really, without thinking. It’s meant to let you “get out of the way” of your thinking and can be a great way to jumpstart your work on the teaching statement. Some possible freewriting prompts:
 - Describe a particularly vivid moment you've experienced as a teacher (or as a student)
 - Describe your ideal teaching/learning moment
 - Imagine how a student of yours would describe the learning in your class
 - Consider: What do you want your students to learn? How do you help them learn? What learning challenges do students face – and how do you help students overcome these obstacles?
- c. *Talk about teaching with a peer*: Sharing your teaching thoughts and stories with someone can help you focus your thinking – and can give you feedback on which of your ideas are most compelling.
- d. *Explore resources*:
CIDR’s “Writing a Teaching Statement” Bulletin
<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/files/2012/12/TeachingStatement.pdf>
“Writing Your Teaching Philosophy”, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Minnesota
<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/index.html>
- e. *Give yourself time to write some drafts*: Once you have a draft, ask colleagues in your discipline and/or at the Center for Teaching and Learning for feedback (email: thectl@uw.edu).

4. What do teaching statements look like? Examples...

- Daniel Borrero Echeverry – Physics, Georgia Institute of Technology
<http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/students/tas/awards/previous>
- Misty La Vigne – Astronomy, University of Maryland
<http://www.astro.umd.edu/~mlavigne/teachingphil.pdf>
- Wendy Morrison – Biology, Georgia Institute of Technology
<http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/students/tas/awards/previous>
- Lindsey Waddell – Geological Sciences, University of Michigan
<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum>

5. Where do you see gaps in your own teaching experience? What can you do next to develop your teaching and/or your teaching statement?

Ways to Continue Developing Your Teaching and Teaching Statement

Opportunities to gain classroom teaching experience:

- 1) Let your interest in teaching be known in your department, or in related departments in which you would be interested in teaching.
- 2) Volunteer to give guest presentations in your advisor's or colleagues' classes: Get feedback from your advisor (if he or she observes), ask a CTL consultant to observe and give feedback, or use a "Minute Paper" at the end of class to get quick written feedback from students.
- 3) Teach at another local college: Many UW graduate students have found opportunities for single-quarter, part-time teaching appointments.
- 4) Apply for a teaching fellowship, e.g.:
 - Huckabay Fellowship -- <http://www.grad.washington.edu/students/fa/huckabay/index.shtml>
 - Program for Interdisciplinary Pedagogy (PIP) -- <http://www.bothell.washington.edu/ias/about/pip>

Making the most of any classroom teaching you do:

- 1) Gather feedback about your teaching: Gathering other kinds of feedback – in addition to your end-of-quarter evaluations – can help you present a more complete picture of your teaching. You might consider:
 - *Collecting midterm feedback from your students*. The CTL can help you in gathering feedback: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/gathering-student-feedback/>
 - *Asking a peer to observe your teaching*. A peer's observation letter can be a strong addition to your teaching portfolio. For hints on peer observation, see: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/collaborating-with-colleagues-classroom-observations/>
 - *Asking committee members or other faculty advisors to observe your teaching*. Even if your advisor won't have time to write up an observation letter to include in your portfolio, they will at least be able to include reflections on your teaching in their recommendation letters for you in the future.
- 2) Record written reflections about your teaching: Even if it's just jotting down a quick note to throw in your "drop box," having some written record of your reflections on a class can be an invaluable resource when it comes time to compose your teaching statement. Some instructors even choose to keep a regular teaching journal, in which they record their thoughts after every class.
- 3) Save assignments, handouts, tests, student papers, and student feedback: Keep anything that might later serve to illustrate who you are as a teacher.

Other (non-classroom) opportunities:

- 1) Consult with the Center for Teaching and Learning: To request a consultation, email: thectl@uw.edu
- 2) Create a teaching “drop box”: Designate someplace as a “drop box” for potential teaching statement materials and ideas. Use it to collect handouts from teaching workshops, copies of assignments and syllabi from classes you observe, or ideas you have for courses you’d like to teach.
- 3) See the Careers Section in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In particular:
 - “Good Teachers Wanted” <http://chronicle.com/article/Good-Teachers-Wanted/45636/>
 - “What’s Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter?” <http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Your-Philosophy-on/45132/>
 - “How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy” <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/>
 - “4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy” <http://chronicle.com/article/5-Steps-to-a-Memorable/124199/htm>
- 4) Explore teaching journals and websites, e.g.
 - Science Education Resource Center at Carleton College (SERC) -- <http://serc.carleton.edu/index.html>
 - *Teaching Sociology* -- <http://www.asanet.org/journals/ts/>
 - See list of teaching/learning periodicals -- <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning/>
- 5) Participate in departmental and campus-wide teaching workshops: Consider compiling a page listing your “efforts to improve teaching” activities to include in your portfolio.
- 6) Participate in UW's Annual TA/RA Conference (September 16 -18th, 2013): Attend conference sessions or apply to become a session facilitator. Full conference program and link to facilitator application will be posted soon at: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/programs/ta-ra-conference/>
- 7) Participate in other teaching/learning conferences:
 - UW’s Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium (April) -- <http://depts.washington.edu/sotl/symposium/index.html>
 - CIRTL Forum (for STEM disciplines – last conference October 2011) -- <http://www.cirtl.net/Forum2011/>
- 8) Participate in outreach opportunities in your college or department:
 - Genome Sciences Education Outreach website -- <http://chroma.gs.washington.edu/outreach/>
 - Engineering Discovery Days -- <http://www.engr.washington.edu/alumcomm/openhouse.html>
 - Become a Science Communication Fellow for Pacific Science Center Portal to the Public: <http://www.pacificsciencecenter.org/Portal-to-the-Public/portal-fellows.html>
- 9) Connect with others interested in teaching and learning:
 - Biology Education Research Group (BERG): <http://uw-berg.wetpaint.com/>
 - Center for Teaching and Learning – Faculty and Professional Learning Communities: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/programs/learning-communities/>
- 10) Tutor: Your department may have its own study or writing center, and campus-wide tutoring centers include CLUE, the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity Instructional Center, and Women in Science and Engineering.
- 11) Observe other instructors: Observing others teach can help you articulate how you would approach teaching similar classes. And, if teaching large classes may be in your future, you can ask if it’s possible to attend a TA meeting to get a sense of how instructors work with TAs.
- 12) Ask for feedback on the quality and clarity of your research talks or seminar presentations (that is, rather than only discussing the quality of the research itself.)
- 13) Visit local colleges: Contact faculty in your discipline at other institutions to arrange informational interviews and to observe classes. Participate in the Graduate School’s visits to community colleges (first week of May).