

Summer PROfessional Development Handout

Session 3: Teaching Philosophy Statements, and Finding your Institutional Fit

Index card poll: The listserv is up and running! How should our community use it? Also, please give us suggestions for establishing the desired level of courtesy and helpfulness.

Teaching Philosophy Statements

NOTE: Some of this material is adapted from CTE and CU-CIRTL handouts and presentations.

Do you remember writing the Personal Statement for your application to grad school? A Teaching Philosophy Statement is similar in that

1. there is no set document style
2. the major points of the statement should be the same for all of your applications
3. the statement should be tailored to each individual institution.

The first of these is quite frustrating: there is no “right way” to do it, no correct format to follow, no specific example to emulate. This gives you freedom – you can write it in whatever style you want – but turning that freedom into a written document is not a straightforward or simple task.

What is a Teaching Philosophy Statement?

- Part of your job application (or tenure-review package)
- A writing sample, which will be read by the Search Committee (and your future colleagues)
- A reflection on your teaching and learning, written in the first person
- An opportunity to describe in some depth an experience that you summarized in a single line or dot-point on your CV

What goes into a teaching philosophy statement?

- There is no right answer
- Courses that you could teach
- Personal stories
- Things you’ve tried that worked well (and why you tried them)

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement requires you to reflect on your teaching experience, but also on *why* you want to teach, and what you’re qualified to teach (hint: you’re qualified for more than you think!). It’s also an opportunity for you to reflect on, and possibly start figuring out, your values. As an example, one of my teaching objectives is to make the world a better place by encouraging my students to become mindful, considerate, active citizens of the world; I hope to raise the level of discourse in society, one classroom of undergraduates at a time. To do this, I incorporate activities designed to improve my students’ critical thinking, media literacy, and analytical skills.

Getting started:

- Look at the list of courses offered by the department (if you're not applying to a particular school yet, look at an appropriate department at the type of institution where you'd like to teach). Say which of these you're qualified to teach.
- If you've taught the equivalent of any of the courses already, write a paragraph about it. Say what you did with the class, what went well, how you assessed your students' learning, how you assessed the effectiveness of your teaching, etc. If you did anything innovative (and it worked well), show off how awesome you are!
- What skills do you want your students to develop? Some of these may be directly related to your field (e.g., proper lab technique), and others may not (e.g., critical thinking skills)
- Think about what kinds of classes you would like to teach, and why. Do you like introductory classes, where you can give potential majors their first taste of your field? Advanced courses, in which you might mentor students who want to go on to graduate school? General education courses, where you can cultivate an appreciation of your discipline in non-majors?
- Have you done any mentoring? How did you guide your mentoree(s)? What did you find most satisfying about that experience?

What to do if you don't have much teaching experience:

- First, address the [types of] courses that you'd be qualified to teach. This should be tailored to the institution to which you're applying – read through the courses listed on the department's website, the institution's course catalog, etc. If you're not applying to a particular school yet, look at an appropriate department at the type of institution where you'd like to teach.
- Think back to when you took (or TAed) the equivalent of some of these courses. Were there any assignments, lessons, or teaching methods that you found particularly effective (or particularly ineffective)? Is there anything that you'd emulate? What would you change?
- Describe how you would teach a particular course in general terms. How would you design the course? Would you incorporate any themes to connect different topics throughout the course? What sorts of assignments would you require? What skills would you want your students to develop through the course?
- For example, "When teaching ____ course, I [would] use a project-based method and design the course around [assignment examples]. Students work on this over the course of the semester, doing things like ____, ____, and ____, which addresses ____ learning outcomes or builds ____ skills."
- Have you done any mentoring? Worked with summer students? Led any workshops? Done any guest lecturing? That counts as teaching experience!
- Read the "Getting started" bullet points above – many of them apply to you.

Tips:

- Tailor it to the institution and department (type of institution, range of students, courses commonly taught in the department) – don't say that you only teach small classes if the intro classes at this department tend to have hundreds of students, and don't say that you really want to teach a very upper level course if the department doesn't offer anything like that.
- This is a writing sample – write it well! (And have friends/colleagues/mentors read it over for proofreading, content, voice, and oomph.)
- Be specific
- Be articulate
- Be enthusiastic about your teaching
- Use action verbs
- Keep to the page limit
- Don't make it sound like you know everything – you're a beginning teacher, so you're not expected to know everything already
- Promote yourself (show how awesome you are!), but be honest
- Show that you care about teaching, and about the institution/department
- Show what you value
- What have you done, or seen done, that worked really well in a classroom?
- What courses do/would you like to teach?
- Don't badmouth any teaching formats – the chair of the selection committee might use traditional lecturing (or active learning) as his/her main form of teaching
- There is no "right answer" – teaching statements don't have a standard format (unlike CVs)

Things to keep in mind:

- You're not expected to be the perfect teacher from day one! As a new hire, you should expect to have a mentor teacher who will show you the ropes and help you develop into a better teacher as you progress through your first few years.
- You're not expected to have completely mastered every aspect of your field. Your graduate career will leave you better prepared to teach some classes than others, but it's likely that you can teach most of the introductory and intermediate courses in your field.
- You're not expected to already know all of the content of every course you'll be teaching. If you vaguely remember the topic from college, you should be fine. If it's a topic that interests you but you haven't thoroughly studied, you should be fine. You'll take time to review the material before and throughout the semester.

Additional Resources:

Figuring out your teaching philosophy: The Teaching Perspectives Inventory

Free online quiz/survey that “will help you identify your perspectives on teaching.”

<http://www.teachingspectives.com/tpi/>

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement (Helen G. Grundman, Bryn Mawr College)

Great how-to for writing your first Teaching Philosophy Statement, including simple exercises to help you figure out what your teaching philosophy actually is.

<http://www.ams.org/notices/200611/comm-grundman.pdf>

Writing the Teaching Statement (Rachel Narehood Austin, Bates College)

Written from the perspective of someone on a faculty search committee

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2006_04_14/nodoi.14633728089694563528

Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy for the Academic Job Search (Chris O’Neal, Deborah Meizlish, and Matthew Kaplan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan)

Includes discussion about figuring out your teaching philosophy, characteristics of a good teaching statement, a rubric for composing and evaluating a teaching philosophy statement, and a FAQ. The second website includes a large number of example statements.

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no23.pdf

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum>

How to write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy (Gabriela Montell, Chronicle of Higher Education)

How to start writing your Teaching Statement

<http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/>

Teaching Statement as Self-Portrait (Mary Anne Lewis, Ohio Wesleyan University)

Essay describing how the author figured out how to “show, not tell” her philosophy in her Teaching Statement. Includes the author’s Teaching Statement and a reflection on Teaching Statements from when she was a member of a search committee.

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/734-teaching-statement-as-self-portrait?cid=chearticlepromo>

Writing your Teaching Philosophy (Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Minnesota)

Excellent multi-page website including overview, explanations, a step-by-step tutorial, checklist, sample Teaching Statements from several fields, and resources/links.

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/>

You may want to start a **Teaching Portfolio**:

<http://www.cte.cornell.edu/resources/documenting-teaching/portfolio/index.html>

Workshop: Figuring out your teaching philosophy

Spend about 10-15 minutes writing answers to some of these questions. Write answers or notes that make sense to you, and that future-you will be able to incorporate into a prose Teaching Statement later on. Then, discuss your answers with the people at your table.

Why do you [want to] teach?

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

What is a teacher's role in the classroom? (E.g., coach, mentor, lecturer, entertainer, drill sergeant, etc.)

What are some of the characteristics of a great teacher?

What's your proudest teaching moment?

Is there anything that you [would] do in your classroom that sets you apart from most people in your field?

How do you assess your students' learning?

How do you assess your effectiveness as a teacher?

Sample Teaching Philosophies

Jennifer Kent-Walsh, Communicative Disorders

Goals & Foundational Principles

Beyond striving to ensure that students learn the fundamental content of the courses I teach, my objectives as a university teacher are as follows: (a) to foster critical thinking skills; (b) to facilitate the acquisition of lifelong learning skills; (c) to help students develop evidence-based clinical problem-solving strategies; and (d) to prepare students to function as highly skilled and competent speech-language clinicians across the scope of practice and in my primary teaching area of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in particular. Furthermore, my overall teaching philosophy is based on two principles, which are supported extensively in the literature: (a) active student learning strongly influences student-learning outcomes; and (b) assessment procedures strongly influence student acquisition of knowledge.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

Given that undergraduate courses in speech-language pathology are necessarily weighted toward acquisition of foundational clinical concepts and knowledge, I use a combination of traditional lecture and problem-based learning formats in my teaching. All of my courses involve at least some WebCT components, giving students opportunities to download lecture note-taking guides and materials and further their knowledge of course content through engagement in complementary online activities (e.g., simulation activities, video case studies).

Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that I use consistently with undergraduate students. This experiential learning tool allows students to apply their knowledge to real-world problems in community contexts and to complete structured reflections on the relationships between assignments, course objectives, and personal educational objectives. I feel it is important to include such activities in all of my classes since writing skills are critical for all speech-language clinicians and researchers. I also use undergraduate research as a teaching tool, since the research process allows students to apply classroom knowledge through scientific questions of specific interest.

Overall Value of My Teaching Role in the University Setting

One of the main reasons why I decided to pursue a career in academia was so that I would have the opportunity to work with future generations of speech-language pathologists and educators in an instructional capacity. I view teaching as central to all of my scholarly activities and regularly include Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) in my strategic plan. These activities allow me to identify and disseminate instructional strategies to ensure that students learn about the cutting edge clinical interventions I research on a daily basis. It is my hope that my teaching will allow me to “keep the flame of scholarship alive” in some way and to inspire students to remain focused on the functional effects of interventions designed to improve clients’ speech, language, and communication skills.

Judith Ruland, Nursing

My philosophy of teaching is based on a belief that learning needs to be student centered and that students need to be equal partners in the learning process. My role involves using my expertise to put the necessary resources in the hands of the students or more likely to be sure that my students are well equipped to find and evaluate the resources they need to answer their questions.

Now that the majority of my teaching is in an online forum, I let students know that my role in the online classroom is to be a facilitator, not a provider of information. I create multiple discussion questions to keep the online discussion exciting and stimulating and to address the multiple backgrounds and interests of my adult learners. I provide a good deal of rigor in my undergraduate classes, but am right there to support them as they seek their answers and to encourage them to work together to get the most out of their learning. I always provide detailed descriptions of writing assignments and I provide samples so that they are able to see what a good finished product should look like. My students often wonder at first "where I am" in that I am not actively "running" a discussion. Instead I am carefully reading, correcting errors when I see them, and then working to analyze what the group has said from a meta perspective. I share my analysis with the class as we end each module.

To me the most important skills that I can help an undergraduate student develop are the skills of information fluency: i.e. their ability to write and critically think about the information that is bombarding them as they enter or continue in the nursing profession. Every course I teach is really seen through the lens of information processing skills needed to be effective

in use of the best available evidence for practice. I am passionate about the use of writing to teach students to be more aware of their thinking and to be careful and reasoned in their acceptance of new information. If they leave me with a healthy skepticism of information and the skill to use technology to access better evidence, I will have accomplished my goal.

Stephen Kuebler, Chemistry

My teaching philosophy is that pedagogic activities should be guided by the principal: “Do this if it enables students to learn.” My teaching practices should empower students to take ownership of their education and help them realize that they are responsible for their learning outcomes. When students take this step, they can make striking progress and achieve academic success. I find that when I can convey my own enthusiasm for physical science, it is often contagious enough that students become engaged in learning. I try to help students transition from memorizing formulas to thinking critically about ideas and connecting concepts with everyday examples. I encourage students to tackle problems creatively, which helps them learn to think outside conventional boundaries and to seek the deeper meaning of a concept or finding. These skills have facilitated the greatest advances in science and also foster personal and intellectual fulfillment.

I believe teaching is the most important service I provide to the Central Florida Community, because I am helping to educate a generation to function knowledgeably in a society where rapid technological advances constantly pose new questions and ethical challenges. I view teaching as inextricably linked with research scholarship. University education must go beyond simply passing on information. It should involve rigorous training in the methods of developing, analyzing, and communicating new knowledge. Teaching should extend well beyond the lecture hall. For many students, the most powerful lessons are learned in informal discussions, working problems during office hours, and encountering science first-hand in the lab.

I chose an academic career because I want to develop new knowledge through research, as well as contribute to my field and society by training top-rate students. There appears to be no single perfect method for teaching, and an important aspect of teaching seems to be identifying the approach, which works best for a given individual. While I believe my teaching has been successful, I also recognize that I have much to learn from my colleagues and students. I look forward to continuing teaching, research, and research training and learning from my students and peers along the way.

Tosha Dupras, Anthropology

The goal of my teaching, and center of my teaching philosophy, is active learning. One of my ultimate objectives in teaching is to facilitate learning by helping students to gain the necessary skills to take control of and become active participants in their own learning. I truly believe that knowledge gained through active participation is knowledge that will stay with an individual. Thus my approach to teaching reflects this philosophy and I have developed and use many techniques that are designed to engage students in their own learning.

I use many different teaching techniques to achieve my philosophy. Biological anthropology is a discipline in which many teaching techniques can be used, particularly hands-on activities. Throughout my tenure at UCF I have worked very hard to build our teaching collections so that all my courses may include an element of hands-on learning. Students have to directly participate in their own learning through these experiences, and I have found that almost all students respond very well to tactile learning (actually “holding” the material in their hands). One particularly innovated teaching method I have developed is a simulated crime scene in the Advanced Forensic Anthropology course in which the students have to apply their cumulated course knowledge. I also believe that students learn from participating in real world activities.

Regardless of content, I also think that students should leave their courses with skills that they will use in their everyday lives. These basic skills include problem solving and critical thinking, research and writing proficiency, and effective communication ability. I have designed all of my courses to include components that impart these skills. All of my upper division courses require research for papers and presentation, and students must also participate in group work. These are skills that students can transfer into any career choice.

Ready to begin your job search?

- You are ready to begin a job search when you have considered the type of positions and institutions that interest you and, more importantly, the positions and institutions where you can be successful. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies 4,635 institutions...
 - 261 Doctoral/Research Universities
 - 611 Master's Colleges and Universities
 - 606 Baccalaureate Colleges
 - 28 Tribal Colleges and Universities
 - 1,669 Associate's Colleges

- At what kind of institution will you be happiest? Successful?
 - “Do I enjoy teaching or research?”
 - “Would I rather grade exams and papers or read dissertations?”
 - “Do I enjoy developing creative teaching methods or innovative research?”
 - “Do I enjoy service or writing grant proposals?”
 - “What do I find most satisfying and enjoyable?”
 - “What gives me energy rather than exhausts it?”

- Ask your advisors and mentors:
 - “Do I have what it takes to be successful at a research university?”
 - “Can I create a sustained and focused program of research, write proposals and get external funding, and publish in top tier journals in my discipline?”
 - “Can I effectively supervise students and staff in a research lab, manage research projects and budgets, and mentor doctoral students and post-docs?” *[In general, these reflect the criteria for successful tenure and promotion reviews at research institutions.]*
 - “Do I have what it takes to be successful at a four-year institution?”
 - “Can I teach three to five classes a semester?”

- “Can I engage students in service learning, cooperative learning, and process education?”
- “Can I effectively involve undergraduates in my research and co-author presentations and publications with my students?”
- “Can I get external funding for equipment or research assistants?”
- “Will I become involved in college and community service activities?”

- Timing of your entry into the job market:
 - Partner and family factors, economic obligations, sense of readiness to leave graduate school (Moore, 1999)

- **How competitive will you be in the areas of critical importance to the institutions to which you apply?**
- **Do you have the support of your major professor and other faculty who will be writing letters of recommendation for your applications?**
- **Do you have the time to launch a job search and not delay your dissertation and degree completion?**