

FACULTY **F**OCUS

Special Report

Philosophy of Teaching Statements: Examples and Tips on How to Write a Teaching Philosophy Statement

May 2009

A MAGNA



PUBLICATION

MAGNA

Philosophy of Teaching Statements: Examples and Tips on How to Write a Teaching Philosophy Statement

For most educators, writing a philosophy of teaching statement is a daunting task. Sure they can motivate the most lackadaisical of students, juggle a seemingly endless list of responsibilities, make theory and applications of gas chromatography come alive for students, all the while finding time to offer a few words of encouragement to a homesick freshman. But articulating their teaching philosophy? It's enough to give even English professors a case of writer's block.

Traditionally part of the teaching portfolio in the tenure review process, an increasing number of higher education institutions are now requiring a philosophy of teaching statement from job applicants as well. For beginning instructors, putting their philosophy into words is particularly challenging. For one thing they aren't even sure they have a philosophy yet. Then there's the added pressure of writing one that's good enough to help them land their first teaching job.

This *Faculty Focus* special report is designed to take the mystery out of writing teaching philosophy statements, and includes both examples and how-to articles written by educators from various disciplines and at various stages of their professional careers. Some of the articles you will find in the report include:

- How to Write a Philosophy of Teaching and Learning Statement
- A Teaching Philosophy Built on Knowledge, Critical Thinking and Curiosity
- My Teaching Philosophy: A Dynamic Interaction Between Pedagogy and Personality
- Writing the "Syllabus Version" of Your Philosophy of Teaching
- My Philosophy of Teaching: Make Learning Fun

As contributor Adam Chapnick writes, "There is no style that suits everyone, but there is almost certainly one that will make you more comfortable. And while there is no measurable way to know when you have got it 'right,' in my experience, you will know it when you see it!"

Mary Bart
Content Manager
Faculty Focus

Table of Contents

How to Write a Philosophy of Teaching and Learning Statement	4
A Teaching Philosophy Built on Knowledge, Critical Thinking and Curiosity	5
My Teaching Philosophy: A Dynamic Interaction Between Pedagogy and Personality	6
Teaching Philosophy and Assumptions	8
Writing the “Syllabus Version” of Your Philosophy of Teaching	9
Education as Becoming: A Philosophy of Teaching	11
A Nurse Educator’s Philosophy of Teaching	12
Teaching and Advising Philosophy and Style	13
My Teaching Philosophy: Make Learning Fun	15
Teaching Philosophy Statements Prepared by Faculty Candidates	16
Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement: Why, What and How	17

How to Write a Philosophy of Teaching and Learning Statement

By Adam Chapnick, PhD

Writing a philosophy of teaching and learning statement isn't meant to be easy. Self-reflection can be awkward, and the teaching and learning environment evokes feelings and emotions that don't necessarily translate well into words. Nevertheless, creating a philosophy of teaching and learning statement is ultimately both personally and professionally rewarding, and is therefore well worth the effort.

Expressing your philosophy of teaching and learning in print serves two main purposes:

1. It presents a capsule summary of your understanding of the value and purpose of teaching and learning to current and prospective employers, students, and colleagues; and
2. It encourages deep self-reflection that in turn enhances your ability to contribute positively to your learning community.

Statements generally proceed in one of two directions. They are either:

- subject- or discipline-specific (a philosophy of teaching history or of teaching physics), and focused on practical, specialized strategies; or
- broader statements of general aims and ideas, focused more on your students themselves than on what they're learning in the classroom.

Neither approach is necessarily better, but one of them generally suits each teacher more than the other. Single-discipline instructors, for example, are more likely to think about teaching and learning in the context of their field. Teachers whose work crosses traditional academic boundaries more regularly, or who combine theoretical study with public policy analysis, might be more apt to take a broader view.

Having determined which approach fits you best, the next issue to consider is style. Teaching and learning philosophies generally come in two forms:

1. Some are constructed as a series of personal paragraphs, drawing attention to the teacher's own thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and values. They tend to include personal anecdotes and examples, and are inevitably written in the first person. This style is the more common of the two, particularly in subject-specific statements.
2. Other teachers write more formally, listing – perhaps through a series of bullets – a set of ideas and opinions that form the basis of the author's understanding of the teaching and learning process. This approach will likely resonate more in task-oriented disciplines and individuals who tend to emphasize accuracy and specificity.

Again, neither approach is inherently superior: the key is to find the one that better reflects who you are and what you believe in. Teachers whose greatest pleasure comes from inspiring their students' creative abilities are more likely to present their philosophy in a less structured manner. Just like they encourage their students not to feel constricted by popular standards or expectations, their prose should flow freely and naturally.

Other teachers, whose excellence is based on their organizational abilities, their clarity inside and outside of the classroom, and the transparency of their attitudes and beliefs, often prefer the uniformity and imposed discipline of a series of bulleted or numbered thoughts and ideas.

Regardless, an effective philosophy of teaching and learning should aim to answer the following questions:

- why do I teach?
- what does good teaching mean to me?
- what does effective learning mean to me?
- do I have a particular teaching style or approach? If so, how would I describe it?
- what makes me unique as a teacher?
- what do I expect from my students?
- what can my students expect from me?
- what do I do to continue to improve?

These questions are in no particular order, and are not exclusive. Subject specific teaching philosophies, for example, will almost certainly answer additional questions such as:

- why am I so passionate about my discipline?
- what strategies make teaching

PAGE 5 ►

FROM PAGE 4

and learning in my discipline come to life?

- how do effective teaching and learning in my discipline contribute to society?

Most 21st century teaching philosophies will also at least mention the author's approach to diversity in the classroom (defined broadly or narrowly) as well as the role of academic technology in the teaching and learning process. In the contemporary educational environment, it is difficult to imagine a classroom – real or virtual – that does not have to take these two factors into consideration.

The standard length of a teaching and learning philosophy is 250-750

words but, ideally, you should aim to develop a version that can fit on a single page. Keeping in mind that one of the purposes of creating a statement of teaching and learning philosophy is to explain yourself to a prospective employer, it makes sense to have an iteration of your statement that adheres to the same basic rules as the standard resume (1 or 2 pages, depending on your degree of specialization or expertise).

It is therefore fairly common for aspiring teachers to create two versions of their philosophies:

- one that is as long as it takes for them to express themselves comfortably; and
- another that can be included in applications that stipulate word and space limitations.

Similarly, some find it easier to develop two entirely separate statements:

- one that is discipline-specific; and
- another that is broader and perhaps more abstract.

There is no style that suits everyone, but there is almost certainly one that will make you more comfortable. And while there is no measurable way to know when you have got it 'right,' in my experience, you will know it when you see it!

Dr. Adam Chapnick is an assistant professor and deputy director of education at Canadian Forces College.



A Teaching Philosophy Built on Knowledge, Critical Thinking and Curiosity

By Susan Judd Casciani

I believe that success – whether personal or professional – is generated from three critical building blocks: knowledge, critical thinking, and curiosity. These building blocks have an enduring, cyclical relationship; knowledge helps us to understand the world around us as well as ourselves, critical thinking gives us the ability to incorporate knowledge and apply it endlessly, and curiosity, which is the result of realizing the limitations of current knowledge, drives us to acquire additional knowledge.

I see my role as a teacher as one of

transferring a fundamental knowledge of course content to students while cultivating their critical thinking skills through the application of theory and concepts to current health-, economic-, and industry-related issues. Through this application, areas that are void of knowledge will ultimately emerge. As a teacher, I will strive to instill a sense of curiosity in my students that will challenge them to fill this void, whether for themselves or for all of us. I will do this by serving as a role model in the sense that I too am searching for knowledge – for me, for them and for the future.

I will demonstrate my own critical thinking skills and share my curiosity for the unexplained or unexamined. I will value the individual backgrounds and experiences of my students, and encourage them to teach me as I teach them.

I expect that my students will have a variety of levels of desire for learning. I will strive to nurture an environment that will encourage them to seek areas that excite them, for I believe that true learning occurs best when it is most meaningful. I will expect my students to understand and

PAGE 6 ►

FROM PAGE 5

utilize their rights for a quality education, and to fulfill their responsibilities to themselves, to me and to each other in our collective efforts to learn and discover.

My ultimate goal in teaching is to

provide requisite knowledge, encourage and develop critical thinking skills, and stimulate natural curiosity that will guide students in their efforts of pursuing success. By accomplishing this, I will satisfy the need within myself to somehow make a difference.

Susan Judd Casciani is a clinical assistant professor and program director of the Health Care Management Program at Towson University. ●

My Teaching Philosophy: A Dynamic Interaction Between Pedagogy and Personality

By B. Jean Mandernach, PhD

My philosophy of teaching can better be described as a philosophy of learning. In order to be an effective instructor, I must focus on student learning and adjust my teaching strategies in response to the pace and depth of student understanding. I view teaching as an interaction between an instructor and a student; thus, the impact of this interaction on learning, rather than my activities as an instructor, is of primary importance. Approaching teaching as a scholarly activity with continual evaluations and adjustments allows me to maintain a focus on student learning and continually improve my instruction. By utilizing flexible teaching strategies, rather than strict adherence to a particular teaching style, I am able to adjust my instruction to match the abilities and preexisting knowledge that each student brings to the classroom. Thus, my primary role as an instructor is to create interactions which foster interest and understanding for individual students.

This approach to learning empha-

sizes a cognitive developmental perspective. As highlighted by developmental theorists, students learn best by actively exploring their environments. This type of “trial-and-error” learning can then be fostered by having a support structure in place to facilitate understanding. The self-paced nature of exploratory learning relies on the notion that effective learning environments actively engage students with the material and promote meaningful associations between new material and information already known. As an instructor, it is my responsibility to help students generate their own context for meaning through the application of new material to their everyday lives.

Reflecting upon the dynamic interaction between pedagogy and personality, my teaching style is best described as applied, mastery instruction. While the specific learning goals of a course are dependent upon the nature of the course, the education level of the students, the purpose of the course within the department, and the relationship between the

course and related courses, I have three overarching goals for any course that I teach: 1) to foster critical thinking so that students may become effective consumers of psychological information, 2) to promote mastery of course content, and 3) to encourage application of course materials to real-world contexts.

Since most students, including psychology majors, will not become psychologists, it is important to teach students information that is relevant to their lives and their futures. The media is full of psychologically-based information; my goal as a psychology instructor is to teach students how to critically examine this information, make decisions about its accuracy/relevance, and utilize the information in their own lives. For example, after a recent university shooting rampage, my Introductory Psychology class spent a considerable amount of time locating information (TV, magazines, newspapers, websites, etc.) about the shootings and examining how this event, and

PAGE 7 ►

FROM PAGE 6

the information surrounding it, can be interpreted in light of psychological theories (parenting styles, adolescent development, group decision making, stereotypes, personality, stress, etc.). This type of active, applied learning has several advantages: 1) it allows students to actively engage with the material which promotes general interest in psychology; 2) it assists students in developing critical thinking skills; 3) it promotes a deeper understanding of how theories are utilized in a real-world context; and 4) it enhances retention of material through active processing and the interrelationship of information.

My second broad goal as an instructor is to promote mastery of the course material. While there is a considerable amount of research concerning the educational benefits of mastery instruction, mastery learning is not often utilized due to the increased time and effort required for this type of instruction. I feel that as an instructor, it is my responsibility to determine exactly what I expect students to understand after completing my course, then to facilitate student learning so that every student reaches this level. This perspective implies that I can articulate my specific learning goals, develop assessments that effectively measure these goals, and have a support structure in place to help students reach this level of understanding. In addition, mastery learning requires flexibility in instruction as different students will master the material at different rates, and different students will require different types of assistance (examples, demonstrations, activities, case studies, etc.) to foster learning.

In order to create a classroom that promotes mastery, application, and

critical thinking, it is important to incorporate a variety of specific teaching strategies that help direct the learning process yet allow students the freedom of active learning. Advances in instructional technology have allowed me to move many of the basic instructional tasks out of the classroom so that valuable class time is available for more integrated, applied learning. Specifically, I use web-based resources in order to administer study questions prior to

I feel that as an instructor, it is my responsibility to determine exactly what I expect students to understand after completing my course, then to facilitate student learning so that every student reaches this level.

class and provide tutorials/discussion questions. In this way, students can use study questions to ensure that they understand (and have completed) the readings, and I can use the results of the study questions to identify aspects of the readings that students are having difficulties with. I can then tailor class time to target areas of confusion and spend less time reviewing easily understood topics. Providing the discussion questions in advance via the web allows students to think more in-depth about selected topics and to be prepared to actively participate in class discussions.

In addition to providing preparation materials, testing is also administered via the web. The web-based format allows students to easily review past tests and study questions. I also like to use web-based discussion threads to promote critical thinking and interactive learning. Through discussion threads, students (or the instructor) can pose questions/comments to which others can respond. While these web-based resources do not provide any unique teaching opportunity that cannot be imitated in the classroom, they allow many activities to be completed outside of regular class time so that limited class time can be dedicated to more advanced activities. Further, web-based resources are invaluable for connecting the instructor to individual students in a large lecture class. Students who would not voice questions in a large lecture setting may be more likely to express concerns via email or participation in an online discussion.

In summary, teaching at this level puts me in the unique position of working with college students who are in the last stage of their formal education. Thus, before they venture into the “real world,” my goal is to ensure students have a basic understanding of psychological concepts and theories so that they may apply this information to their own lives and become effective, critical consumers of psychological information.

B. Jean Mandernach is an associate professor of psychology and research associate for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Park University. ●

Teaching Philosophy and Assumptions

By Adam Chapnick, PhD

Teaching combines knowledge, skill, passion, and compassion. I believe:

1. *Students are people.* They are proud, confident, eager to learn, but also insecure. They respond to people who make them feel listened to and respected; people who challenge them and inspire them to question; people who reward their successes and encourage them to improve.
2. *Teachers are role models both in the classroom and in the community.* Students look up to teachers whom they respect, and good teachers take pride in learning from their students.
3. *Preparation and enthusiasm are cornerstones of effective teaching.* They are contagious and inspire success. Successful teachers are committed and dedicated to improving themselves and their students.
4. *Good teachers always try to be fair.* They do not ask from their students that which they would not ask from themselves. They communicate high, yet realistic and achievable expectations, and then encourage students to over-achieve. They recognize that students learn in different ways and respond differently to a variety of forms of instruction

and assessment. They develop lessons and evaluate student progress with the diversity of student learning styles and backgrounds in mind.

5. *Students learn best when they are aware of not only what is required of them, but also what is fair to require from their teachers.*

Preparation and enthusiasm are cornerstones of effective teaching. They are contagious and inspire success. Successful teachers are committed and dedicated to improving themselves and their students.

Just as students must meet strict analytical and temporal expectations, teachers should mark thoroughly and return assignments promptly. Feedback should be detailed, and means of improvement should be outlined specifically. Students should be congratulated for their achievements, and shown how to learn from their mistakes.

6. *Effective teaching requires flexibility.* Teachers must try to make themselves available to meet with students and explore their concerns both inside and outside of the classroom. Students are more likely to require assistance when assignments are due, and teachers should endeavor as best they can to schedule academic and personal commitments accordingly.

7. *Teaching can always be improved.* Professional development – remaining abreast of pedagogical advancements in the field, taking advantage of changes in academic technology, promoting the importance of teaching in the community, and maintaining a research program which expands the depth and breadth of knowledge of the teaching subject matter – is crucial to an instructor’s long term effectiveness. Academic colleagues, teaching assistants, and student evaluations are all invaluable sources of assistance.

Dr. Adam Chapnick is an assistant professor and deputy director of education at Canadian Forces College. ●

Writing the “Syllabus Version” of Your Philosophy of Teaching

By B. Jean Mandernach, PhD

Every teacher has a philosophy of teaching...whether they know it or not. Simply put, a philosophy of teaching is your conceptualization of the teaching and learning process. While some people have very explicit and clear teaching philosophies, others have invested less time in formulating a concrete picture of their position on the teaching-learning dynamic.

Despite the fact that you typically don't craft your philosophy of teaching with a student audience in mind, there is value in creating a modified, “syllabus version,” of your teaching philosophy.

There are many reasons to articulate your philosophy of teaching, some reasons driven by external requirements and others by the personal or pedagogical value inherent in reflecting on your approach to teaching. You may be asked to prepare your teaching philosophy as a component of your application for an academic position, as supportive documentation in your portfolio for promotion/tenure consideration, or as a portion of an application for teaching awards/grants (Montell, 2003). Alternatively, you may elect to articulate your philosophy of teaching as a reflective activity to clarify your role as a teacher, examine the relationship between your theoretical approach to teaching and your classroom practices, or highlight personal instructional and educational goals (Brookfield, 1990; Goodyear & Allchin, 1998).

But, beyond personal insight or academic requirements, there is another reason – an equally, if not more, important reason – to articulate your philosophy of teaching: *to provide guidance and direction to the students in your*

classes. Despite the fact that you typically don't craft your philosophy of teaching with a student audience in mind, there is value in creating a modified, “syllabus version,” of your teaching philosophy.

In contrast to the one-to-two page, theoretically-driven, fully-justified, rationally-supported philosophy of teaching that is geared toward your academic peers, the “syllabus version” of your teaching philosophy is a condensed description that highlights the key components of your personal philosophy with a particular emphasis on the implications of your philosophy for your students. Students don't need- or want- to know the evolution of your conceptualization of teaching, nor are they highly invested in understanding the nuances of why you select particular instructional strategies or the theoretical underpinnings of your pedagogical endeavors. Rather, they need to know your perspective on your role as the teacher and how this translates into your expectations for your students.

With this in mind, how do you modify your philosophy of teaching for inclusion in the syllabus?

1) *Start by crafting your “complete” philosophy of teaching.*

There are a number of ways to go about conceptualizing and creating your personal philosophy of teaching; see Chism (1998) or Goodyear and Allchin (1998) for popular models. In addition, the Internet is filled with guidelines and recommendations for writing an effective philosophy of teaching; see

- <http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio/philosophy/Philosophy.html>,

- <http://www.cofc.edu/~cetl/Essays/DevelopingaPhilosophyofTeaching.html>,

- <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2003/03/2003032702c.htm>,

- <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/philosophy.html> or

- <http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/sltcc/tipps/philosophy.html> for detailed information about how to write a teaching philosophy- and what to avoid when doing so.

2) *Reflect on your philosophy by asking yourself “What does this mean for my students?”* As you review your teaching philosophy, focus on the implications for students. In three or four sentences, summarize the key components of your philosophy as it applies to your classroom and/or the expected interactions between you and your students. In essence, the “syllabus version” of your philosophy of teaching starts by explaining to the students your general view on teaching/learning and your rationale for structuring their educational experience in the manner that you do.

PAGE 10 ►

- 3) *Clearly define your role in the classroom and the learning process.* In one or two sentences, define for your students how you will approach learning activities and what behaviors they can expect from you in relation to your philosophy.
- 4) *Highlight your expectations for your students in relation to your philosophy of teaching.* In one or two sentences, describe the behaviors you expect from your students as it relates to your approach to their educational experience. Be concrete and explicit so that your expectations serve as a guide to direct student activity in the course.

The key in crafting the “syllabus version” of your philosophy is not to try to capture or convey the complexities surrounding your philosophy of the teaching-learning interaction. Rather, you should strive to maintain a student focus and integrate only the aspects of your philosophy that are central for the learner. With this in mind, keep the following considerations in mind when adapting your philosophy of teaching for inclusion in the syllabus:

- *Be brief, clear, and concise.* Students cannot benefit from a teaching philosophy that they do not read or that they do not understand.
- *Utilize student-centered language.* Write the “syllabus version” of your teaching philosophy in a manner that talks to the student rather than about them.
- *Avoid using pedagogical jargon.* Again, students can’t benefit from a philosophy that they don’t understand; utilize language relevant to the student population.
- *Adjust the “syllabus version” to be relevant to each class.* While your philosophy of teaching is stable, your expectations of students in relation to your philosophy may change according to class level, course content or student characteristics; it is important to adjust the “syllabus version” of your teaching philosophy accordingly.

Because teaching philosophies are often composed to meet institutional requirements for tenure and promotion, or as part of the job search process, they rarely reflect a student audience. Revising your teaching philosophy into a “syllabus version” is an ideal way to test our theory-driven proclamations about teaching against the realities of classroom teaching. [Editor’s note: see sidebar for an example of a syllabus version.]

References:

Brookfield, S. (1990). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chism, N. V. N. (1998). Developing a philosophy of teaching statement. *Essays on Teaching Excellence* 9 (3), 1-2. Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education.

Goodyear, G. E. & Allchin, D. (1998) Statement of teaching philosophy. *To Improve the Academy* 17, 103-22. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Montell, G. (2003, March 27). What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter? *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved February 26, 2009 from <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2003/03/2003032701c.htm>.

B. Jean Mandernach is an associate professor of psychology and research associate for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Park University. ●

Student-centered Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy of teaching can better be described as a philosophy of learning. So, what does this mean for you? I consider this course to be an equal collaboration between you and me. As such, it is my responsibility to be an effective instructor; this means that it is my job to monitor your learning and adjust my teaching strategies in response to the pace and depth of your understanding. But as, with all successful collaborations, my involvement is only half of the equation; in order for this to be a valuable educational experience, you must be an effective student. What you will gain from this course depends upon your investment in learning. Learning relies upon the interaction between you, me and the course material; thus, it is your investment in this interaction that will drive your mastery of course material.

As we progress through this course, I will utilize a range of instructional strategies to target the abilities and preexisting knowledge that each of you brings to the classroom. I will strive to create interactions which foster interest and understanding for each of you. In exchange, I expect you to invest full effort in all learning activities, engage in the course material and apply yourself to a deeper understanding of course material. ●

Education as Becoming: A Philosophy of Teaching

By *Ralph S. Stevens III, PhD*

In a lecture in my world literature courses I talk to my students about why we read literature. These students are not taking the course because they want to read Homer and Sophocles. They are taking it because we tell them they have to. World lit is a degree requirement. But why do we require it?

My answer is based on a distinction between education and training. Training, I say, is learning to do. Education is learning to become. Both are important, and each is part of what we call “a college education.” Together they are what I think of as teaching.

I am training my students when I teach them how to do things like unpack a metaphor or identify the climax in the plot of a Greek tragedy; showing them how to use secondary sources in a documented essay, or how to resolve a paradox in a metaphysical poem. Successful teaching results in students being able to do such things.

Education is different. I point out that the word “education” comes from the Latin *e-ducere*, meaning “to lead out” and I say that for me this means leading out the best in a student. Here, teaching means exciting the affections and the imagination. It means leading out of a student not her inherent ability to do something—that’s training—but her capacity to respond to something so as to know the value it has, for her, for her community. Education, by this definition, “leads out” the ability to feel horror at the

horrible and disgust at the disgusting, pleasure at the pleasing and joy at things that are good.

This is why we read literature, I tell them. We read to develop the imagination, so as to recognize the nature of things and people. We read to develop the affections, in learning to respond to what we imagine. A work of literature invites us to enter and imagine a world both strange and familiar. My students have never known the characters, or been to the places, they read about. They don’t know what it’s like to be an epic hero like Odysseus. The world of the Trojan War is a strange one. But they can imagine what it would be like for a man to stand alone on a strange island, as Odysseus does at the nadir of his adventures, pleading for hospitality from a teenage girl doing her laundry with her friends.

This is education, the act of becoming whole people by developing the affections and the imagination. It is the other part of teaching. But training and education, are not separate. Teaching as training brings me into contact with, not a machine to be programmed to do certain things, but that whole person who is the concern of education. My teaching to do can be conducted so as to be learning to become, appealing to the best in each of my students.

But how? I begin with communication as the foundation of good teaching, because through effective communication I can reach the whole person. The principles I follow are

simple: be accessible to students and treat them with respect. Accessibility means being available not just during class and office hours, but at any reasonable time. I encourage them to call me at home, and I promise them a response to email messages within 24 hours.

As important as being accessible is being respectful. I make it a principle to avoid anything sarcastic, disparaging or condescending in my communication, and to be always courteous and encouraging. It is the best way to “lead out” the best in a person.

Good communication is the foundation of instruction. Instruction itself is student-centered. I once heard an experienced teacher say that learning begins with questions and “there is knowledge in the room.” No one comes to a lesson without some knowledge, and students who ask questions already have some grasp of what they are trying to learn. I try to include in my each assignment something that will elicit knowledge and questions. When introducing a new work of literature, for example, I ask students to discuss what it was like for them to read that work. I use threaded discussions in our course platform, Blackboard, and make active participation a third of the course grade, with high standards for participation. I participate and am able to see, from students’ posts, what they know (“there is knowledge in the room”) and what their questions are (“learning begins with questions”). What I learn from discussions then informs what I present in my lectures.

In these ways and others, I make the student, rather than the subject matter, the center of my teaching. The extent to which these methods succeed is the extent to which I can educate, leading out the best in my students.

Ralph S. Stevens III, Ph.D. is an associate professor of English at Coppin State University. ●

A Nurse Educator's Philosophy of Teaching

By *Frostenia Milner*

....we learn from one another how to be human by identifying ourselves with others, finding their dilemmas in ourselves. What we all learn from it is self-knowledge. The self we learn about ...is every self. IT is universal - the human self. We learn to recognize ourselves in others... (It) keeps alive our common humanity and avoids reducing self or other to the moral status of object (Watson, 1985/1988, pp. 59-60).

I am a novice to baccalaureate nursing education. My goal is to participate in preparing nursing students to practice as generalist within the health care social environment. It is my responsibility to create a student-centered classroom that fosters the practice of critical thinking, the development of clinical thinking, and life-long learning. The classroom is where caring in nursing is role modeled for the student. Caring is demonstrated when there is acknowledgment that students come to the classroom with a variety of educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. I believe that education is a two-way proposition. The student's part of the proposition is to come to class prepared to learn and my part is to create an interactive environment that engages the student in the learning process in and out of the classroom.

Nursing is a dynamic discipline. Life-long learning is integral to

survival with ever changing technologies and therapies. My teaching methods incorporate argument mapping to develop clarity of

I believe that education is a two-way proposition. The student's part of the proposition is to come to class prepared to learn and my part is to create an interactive environment that engages the student in the learning process in and out of the classroom.

reasoning based on supporting evidence and to come to a conclusion, which in the case of nursing is the most appropriate clinical decision (Billings, 2008). Through this guided process the content to be taught is discovered as the student works through the problem. I use problem-based learning which is a well established strategy for developing critical thinking (Rogal and Snider, 2008). Case studies are used to simulate experiences allowing the student to crit-

ically analyze their actions, reflect on their own skill sets, and critique the clinical decisions of others (Jeffries, 2007). Learning from these methods are evaluated using multiple choice tests, debriefing, discussion and observation.

My teaching philosophy is in its infancy. I will use humor to engage my students and include their feedback as I continue to learn and grow, for I want to live this philosophy.

Frostenia Milner is clinical coordinator at the School of Nursing, North Carolina A&T State University. ●

Teaching and Advising Philosophy and Style

By W. Stephen Damron

For me, the most important part of teaching, advising, and mentoring students is caring. It all begins with caring for students and what becomes of them. They are real people. They have needs and wants, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams. I am part of the hopes and dreams because I help them with the education that they have factored into their futures. That leap-of-faith on their part vests me with enormous interest in what becomes of them. It makes me a better person, a better teacher, and a better mentor. As long as caring is there, I find I can dislike them, be angry with them, hurt by them, perplexed, exasperated, put out, or just generally disgruntled with them and still teach them. What I do not feel I could ever do is be indifferent to them and still be effective. Besides, caring for them has its perks. I find that when I care they care back, and I like that.

Listening is next to caring. The people I presume to teach deserve my ear above all others except my wife and children. Even if that were not so, I simply could not teach without listening. The success of my classroom style depends on feedback during class, after class, and on evaluations. Practicing a listening attitude is essential or that feedback will not happen in a way that helps us. Listening also means listening to the non-verbal responses from the group.

I try to read the level of understanding they are achieving from my explanations and make adjustments or even start over if necessary. Listening

I have discovered through the years that a very important thing I can do for my students (and myself) is to share the real me, warts and all, with them. How can I expect them to be honest with me unless I am willing to be honest with them?

is especially important in advising. Good advising depends on hearing what the advisee says, and sometimes what isn't being said as well. It depends on asking the right questions and patience to wait for the real answer, not just the one that comes out first. Good listening also requires thinking about what I've heard before responding to it.

As in so much of life, time on task is required. I owe my students my time, which includes time spent with them and time spent on their behalf.

For me to be a complete teaching professional, I must offer time for a conversation in the hall. I need to be in the classroom before class begins and stick around after class is over. My office door needs to be open, with me inside as much as possible for students to stop by or call for my help, advice or whatever they need. I owe them the time to read a resume and offer constructive comments. I owe them the time to discuss career alternatives they may be wrestling with, or personal problems they may bring to me. I owe my students the time necessary to write the best lectures my skills will allow. I owe them the time required to write a good, thoughtful, honest letter of recommendation when they ask. I also owe them time in thought, thinking about how I might do my job better and serve them more effectively. Good teaching is time consuming.

I have discovered through the years that a very important thing I can do for my students (and myself) is to share the real me, warts and all, with them. Part of the reason for this is that I feel they deserve to relate to a person genuinely willing to expose his feelings, values, and a distinctive viewpoint about his society and the world. The other less noble reason is that students recognize when I try to fake it. How can I expect them to be honest with me unless I am willing to be honest with them? What my students get is the real me. I never try to hide a bad mood, or the fact that they've angered me, or hurt me, or failed to meet my expectations. If I am insecure about a lecture or class activity, I don't try and fake it. I tell them. I find they are more than willing to forgive me a commonplace lecture or activity if I don't press on as if it were good. Similarly, I tell them if I feel they did a good job on

PAGE 14 ►

an exam or if they especially pleased me in a day's discussion session. I am human too and they need to know that. There is freedom in just being me that helps teaching and learning to happen. There is an honesty that becomes a part of one-on-one relationships that can be achieved no other way.

I owe it to my students to challenge them. That commitment is rooted deeply in my own experiences. As my life has progressed, I have become increasingly aware that the people who have held me to higher standards are the ones I hold in increasingly higher regard. In my own teaching, I prefer respect in the long term than to always have their fond regard in the short term, and thus I challenge them. If there is one thing that practicing this craft has taught me, it is that I rarely get more by asking for less. Thus, my courses are rigorous and demanding. I consider myself a lifelong learner and promote that attitude with my students. People need to learn the value of reading, writing, and reflective thought. They also need to practice. I provide opportunities. I feel that is a responsibility to them, my colleagues, and to society.

I hope I leave my students stronger after they interact with me. Students should leave my class with the basis for a new perspective or with a question to mull or a curiosity to satisfy. An advisee should leave my office with confidence that together we are charting the path he/she wants, or at least making progress toward finding a path. A student looking for a new major should feel he/she has an honest and fairly presented picture of my discipline and thus be enabled to make such an important decision. Even a student with whom I am in disagreement

should feel empowered by the respect and honesty with which I deal with them during the disagreement.

Learning is serious business and I do my best to convey that attitude with my actions. I establish policies in my class that I feel actively promote responsibility and I run a tight ship in my classroom. My students and I have such little time

As a teacher, it is my job to stimulate and encourage thinking rather than to provide answers and resolve problems.

together that there is no time to waste with disruptive behaviors or busy work. However, learning is best accomplished when enjoyed, so I keep my classroom atmosphere light with humor and by encouraging student participation. I also explain the rules up front and stick to them. I have found that I can ask and receive a great deal from students if I am open, fair in what I expect, and equitable in my treatment of them.

I try always to convey a sense of wonder and adventure about learning. When I was in graduate school, I took Mineral Nutrition from Dr. Jane Savage. Mineral nutrition had never been one of my favorite topics until then. One day while reviewing a journal article in class Dr. Savage commented, "I think this is so interesting!" Earth shaking commentary it was not. Yet, I will never forget that statement or that wonderful lady and teacher. It was not what she said but the fact that we all knew she meant what she said. She made the

room come alive with excitement over the topic by the simple willingness to share her own enthusiasm. It occurred to me that not only were the intricacies of the topic at hand indeed interesting but so was the entire topic of mineral nutrition. My enthusiasm for the topic persists to this day. What a gift! I try to give others that same gift.

As a teacher, it is my job to stimulate and encourage thinking rather than to provide answers and resolve problems. It is my obligation to give students professional competency, energy, demand of excellence, and fair treatment. It is my job to touch lives and challenge them to learn how to use their inherent capabilities and their knowledge base to resolve problems for themselves. To do this, I have to ask questions they must work hard to answer. The great pay off in that is when they ask questions I must work hard to answer.

I am not a man of many or varied causes. I simply believe that the only hope for mankind and our world is for as many of us as possible to know as much as possible about that world and ourselves. Helping with the knowing is what I do. I teach.

W. Stephen Damron is a professor and teaching coordinator in the Animal Science Department at Oklahoma State University. ●

My Teaching Philosophy: Make Learning Fun

By David E. E. Sloane, PhD

My teaching philosophy is that all learning experiences should be fun and exciting, and if they aren't, the teaching modality needs to seek and adapt new strategies, whether game playing, behaviors, model test cases, or lecture-discussion combinations that shake up the lecture model. Then, the learning process should be narrowed down to specific behaviors which can be demystified, easily practiced, easily replicated, and, at base, subject to easy memorization around key words. I have organized an online Mark Twain course around four words beginning with E, for example. Everybody starts from the same reference point to document, illustrate, or argue.

My classroom is a nutty place, especially in the speaking and writing courses I am thinking about here. Every nutty thing I do is intended to help students recall the connected ideas or behaviors. I circulate a candy bowl while I'm talking; chocolate is an added retrieval cue, and a real atmosphere-relaxer. They remember what we were talking about when they remember the chocolate. I sing the prepositions to "Yankee Doodle," accompanied by my banjo. They beg for more—who wants to hear more about prepositions!? What it boils down to is fitting specific knowledge, behaviors, and actions around key organizing ideas, and I make them easy to remember and fun to play with. We often repeat the keywords as a

drill exercise, and "own" them absolutely.

I build larger skills and concepts around keywords. I ask my students to chant them when we review the material, and I ask a random student to explain one or another—always simply, always citing simple behaviors. By the end of a given course in Business Writing, Technical Writing, or Advanced Public Speaking, students have explained and chanted many times. The drilling is fun, as well, because they can shout. Yes, I have a noisy classroom, but they remember the associated skills and techniques, and they have to say them until they can say them with assurance. Learning gets to be a little like cheerleading. It works for them, so it works for me.

My biggest target is students achieving both holistic organization and behavioral mastery of the atomistic individual skills. An example from a speaking course might be helpful. The course is built around six rules. Rule 1 is "Control Your Environment." This allows me to introduce the theories of Maslow about self actualization and relate them to a speaking environment. The atomistic behaviors develop into a list of 15 specific actions each student can do—control the temperature, move desks and chairs, make a seating chart, greet entering audience members individually, and so on. Fearful undergraduates and withdrawn graduate students become

dynamic confident speakers when they have named behaviors to perform. The focus is on a concept, behaviors to fulfill the concept, and the experience of executing the concept, with its simple keywords, in various situations. Focusing on holistic/atomistic goal setting and achievement is also a skill that generalizes to all areas of life—which is what I urge them to remember. By the end of the course, each student can provide six holistic concepts organized into 40-50 or more atomistic behaviors and tell which ones they will use, and why. Giving students de-mystified behaviors at the center of the course gives them so much to do positively and actively that they don't have time for stage fright or other negatives.

It's fair to ask if this can be generalized. Yes. Students use a book and index cards. First, they bring three cards with a sentence from the reading. Any sentence is correct! This is process. The next day I ask another student to explain the first student's sentence. I look for volunteers, then I ask fail-safe questions to model the explanation behavior. Everyone's sense of idea-sentences grows. Building through a course like this, students amass hundreds of index cards; they are allowed to use them on tests. The reward is attractive. It highly motivates especially those students who are "lost" but yearning for a key to getting good grades. They willingly do the hard work of taking intense notes on their reading because they know there is a pay-back. By repetition, students get to pick better and better sentences, often making more than three cards. I eliminate the mystery factor and the guessing factor, and reward plain systematic hard work.

In English literature courses, I try to do the same. My students get a

PAGE 16 ►

worksheet that identifies a wide number of minor forms in poetry. Before we talk about "meaning," where the untestable generalities flourish, we count nouns, verbs, and adjectives to see if the poem is concrete, emotional, or active, since these traits correlate with eras and modes of English poetry, we learn to discover mechanical things about

poems. I am applying ideas of Josephine Miles and Kenneth Burke, but I am adding the sense that a poem is a machine like a motorcycle, and they can take it apart in much the same way as mechanics work on an engine.

For me, teaching is about what the students take away with them that they can always bring back as a simple behavior. The things they

study may be mysteries—wonderful ones—but the procedures they apply should be simple and easily performed, not mysterious. I love teaching like this.

David E.E. Sloane, PhD., is a professor of English and Education at the University of New Haven. ●

Teaching Philosophy Statements Prepared by Faculty Candidates

By Maryellen Weimer

Typically, teaching philosophy statements are prepared as part of promotion and tenure dossiers or for teaching awards. However, increasingly they are being requested by those interviewing for open faculty positions. The article referenced below documents the extent to which that is happening in one discipline.

What should faculty reviewers look for in a teaching philosophy statement of a candidate? What should those applying for academic positions put in a teaching philosophy statement? The author of this article suggests models of teaching and learning. Of learning, he writes, "Candidates should demonstrate knowledge of models of how students learn, how best to encourage learning, and how to assess whether learning has occurred." (p. 336) It is equally important that candidates be able to discuss how they would apply their written philosophy in different teaching situations. The importance

of the philosophy statement and of teaching itself is reinforced when candidates are asked to discuss them with those conducting the interview.

As for what a new faculty member should put in the teaching philosophy statement being used as part of an application packet, the author makes a number of recommendations. Along with ideas about how students learn, those activities that the candidate believes promote learning, some recognition of variations in approaches to learning, and a discussion of factors related to learning should be included. Also important is the kind of feedback that will be provided to students, and how their learning will be assessed. Content that relates to teaching, including expectations for students, preferred learning environments, favored instructional methods, and the nature of relationships with students that foster learning, should be discussed.

The author recommends that teaching philosophy statements

include references so that the candidate can demonstrate a knowledge of literature relevant to college-level teaching and learning. The philosophy statement should show that the candidate is interested in teaching and expects to grow and develop further as a teacher.

Teaching continues to be an important part of virtually all academic positions. As the author points out, search committees often are more comfortable assessing the research history and potential of candidates than they are evaluating what kind of teacher the candidate will be. Careful analysis of a teaching philosophy statement, coupled with follow-up questions on its content, can provide much revealing information about a candidate's potential. To ensure that all candidates start from the same place, it is appropriate to provide a list of areas that review committees would like the teaching philosophy statement to address. This

PAGE 17 ►

article proposes a structure and a series of questions that can be used as a starting place. It also contains a link to a sample philosophy statement that follows the proposed structure. If an institution wants to

show a candidate that it takes teaching seriously, one of the best times to convey that message is during the interview process.

Reference: Eierman, R.J. (2008). The teaching philosophy statement:

Purposes and organizational structure. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 85 (3), 336-339.

Reprinted from The Teaching Professor, May 2008. ●

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement: Why, What and How

By P. N. Ramani, PhD

Most teachers applying for academic positions in colleges and universities are often asked to submit a statement that explains their teaching philosophy. People responsible for selecting and recruiting teachers, however, are divided in their opinions about why such a statement is required or how it is used (Montell, 2003).

While some institutions use the statement to weed out those who are not committed to teaching as a vocation and also those who may be good researchers but poor teachers, most candidates consider the requirement as a potential stumbling block in their job search. The statement is sometimes seen as a way of letting the applicants know about the importance of sound teaching principles and practices. In other words, the institution would expect to have an indication of whether the candidate has thought seriously about teaching and learning. (Montell, 2003).

Even if academics do not agree on the importance of a teaching statement in the hiring or tenure process, every practising teacher should be able to write a statement

A teaching philosophy statement is a kind of personal "mission statement" for anyone who is committed to teaching. It demonstrates that you are reflective and purposeful about your teaching, and helps to communicate your goals as a teacher and your corresponding actions in the classroom.

discussing coherently what they do in the classroom and why.

Content

A teaching philosophy statement is a kind of personal "mission statement" for anyone who is committed to teaching. It demonstrates that you are reflective and purposeful about your teaching, and helps to communicate your goals as a teacher and your corresponding actions in the classroom.

Key elements

A teaching philosophy statement usually includes:

- Your goals and values – your personal values as a teacher and goals for your students,
- Your description of how you teach – the approaches and methods (unique to you and specific to your discipline) you use to achieve those objectives,
- Your assumptions about teaching and learning – your justification for why you teach the way you teach, and
- Your discussion of how you intend to measure through self and student assessment your effectiveness vis-à-vis the objectives and methods you have outlined.

The statement may describe how you want to make a difference in the lives of your students and your path to professional improvement (Chism, 1998; Haugen, 1998; Mihram & Anderson, 2004).

PAGE 18 ►

Benefits

A well articulated teaching philosophy statement offers several benefits to the teacher, at both personal and professional levels. At the personal level, it helps preserve "your personal sanity and morale" as it helps clarify to yourself why you are doing what you are doing (Brookfield, 1990, p. 16).

At the professional level, as mentioned before, it helps you to discuss coherently what you do in the classroom and why you do it in that way. It helps you to be clear about the effect you are having "on students and their learning" (Brookfield, 1990, pp. 18-19). It also sets the benchmark for measuring the appropriateness of your instructional methods, the scope of your activities in and out of the classroom, the assessment of student learning, and the effectiveness of your teaching.

Moreover, the statement "provides stability, continuity, and long-term guidance" and helps you "remain focused on teaching goals and to appreciate the personal and professional rewards of teaching." (Goodyear and Allchin, 1998, pp. 106-7) It can thus lead to a change in your teaching behaviors and ultimately foster professional and personal growth.

Developing a teaching philosophy statement

There is no one formula or a set format for writing a teaching philosophy statement. You may use a question/answer format or use visuals and quotes. It is generally 1-2 pages long and written in first-person, mostly using the present tense. It is written in a language that can be easily understood by the readers. You may seek guidance from someone in your field on the discipline-specific jargon and issues to

include in, or exclude from, your statement. (<http://ftad.osu.edu>)

Key questions to ask of yourself

As a first step towards developing a teaching philosophy statement, Chism (1998) suggests asking oneself some basic questions, such as the following. The answers to these may be incorporated in your teaching philosophy statement.

- What are my concepts or views on how people (like my students) learn and how can I facilitate that learning?
- What goals do I have for my students and why?
- How do I transform my concepts about teaching and learning and goals for my students into classroom practices?
- How do I know that my classroom practices are effective?

By including specific examples of teaching strategies and techniques, your statement will help your readers visualize the rich learning environment you want to create for your students.

Own your teaching philosophy

This is your teaching philosophy, not someone else's. You will have a sense of "ownership" of the teaching philosophy statement by writing about your own beliefs and experiences. It is better to avoid dogmatic statements, such as "students learn effectively only through group work" or "the best way to teach is through the problem-based learning method". In this way, you appear open to other

ideas about teaching and learning.

Use metaphors

In describing your concept of the teaching-learning process, you may use metaphors, such as "container-receptacle or vessel", "journey-guide", "master-disciple", "filling station", "coach", "gardener", or "choreographer", as a way of articulating your ideas. Your readers will have a clearer understanding of how you see your role vis-à-vis your students in the teaching-learning process (Grasha, 1996). Metaphors also help demonstrate your understanding of the purpose of education and the role of a teacher in the educational process.

Make it memorable and unique

A teaching philosophy statement should set you apart from others. It should create a vivid impression of one who demonstrates clear thinking, unique teaching practices, and commitment to the vocation of teaching. By including specific examples of teaching strategies and techniques, your statement will help your readers visualize the rich learning environment you want to create for your students.

Key questions others will ask in reviewing

- Are the concepts and views presented clearly and lucidly?
- Does the approach to teaching and learning demonstrate reflective thinking and careful planning or flexibility when appropriate?
- Does it address fully the institutional context of teaching and learning, and scholarly research in the field?
- Does the statement show awareness of the conventions and expectations of the discipline?

FROM PAGE 18

- Is the statement modest or ambitious? (Mihram & Anderson, 2004; http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/teaching_philosophy/)

Conclusion

A teaching philosophy statement is a living document that evolves over time. It need not be comprehensive, but should be interesting to read. It should essentially state what you actually believe in and practice.

References

- Brookfield, S. (1990). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chism, N. V. N. (1998). Developing a philosophy of teaching statement.
- Essays on Teaching Excellence* 9 (3), 1-2. professional and

Organizational Development Network in Higher Education.

Goodyear, G. E. & Allchin, D. (1998). Statement of teaching philosophy. *To Improve the Academy* 17, 103-22. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Grasha, A. F. (1996). *Teaching with style: A practical guide to enhancing learning by understanding teaching and learning styles*. Pittsburgh, PA: Alliance Publishers.

Haugen, Lee (1998). Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement. Center for Teaching Excellence, Iowa State University, March 1998; Last update: January 6, 2009.

Mihram, Danielle & Anderson, Lawford (2004). Stating Your Teaching Philosophy. PowerPoint Presentation, University of Southern California, October 20, 2004.

Montell, Gabriela (2003). What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and

Does it Matter? *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Chronicle Careers), March 27, 2003.

Stating a Teaching Philosophy (2007). Last Modified: 30 November 2007.

University of Southern California, Center for Teaching and Excellence website. http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/teaching_philosophy/

Dr. P. N. Ramani, a professor of English, is currently Quality Assurance Officer, QA Department, at the Ministry of Manpower in the Sultanate of Oman. ●

Reach, Motivate, and Inspire Your Students!



The acclaimed newsletter devoted to the art and science of better teaching.

The Teaching Professor is an industry leader in providing ideas, insight, and the best strategies supported by the latest research, to educators who are passionate about effective teaching in the college classroom.

The Teaching Professor helps you:

- Overcome obstacles to effective teaching
- Stay abreast of the latest pedagogical research
- Hear what's working for colleagues "in the trenches"
- Hone your skills and stay on top of teaching innovations
- Truly connect with your students
- Start your subscription today

A MUST read for:

- Teaching professors
- Academic deans
- New faculty
- Faculty development staff
- Department chairs
- Administrators

With each issue, *The Teaching Professor* delivers thought-provoking and inspirational articles on a wealth of critical topics. Brief and to the point, it covers such subjects as:

- Student-centered learning
- Mentoring new and adjunct faculty
- Overcoming student apathy
- Energizing and re-inspiring experienced faculty
- Integrating new technology
- Responding to course evaluations and feedback
- And more!

Exceptional Value!

1 full year ... as low as \$89!

Ask about multiple-copy subscriptions. Available in print, online, or both. Choose the online version of *The Teaching Professor* and enjoy these extras:

- Free access to our full archive of back issues!
- Convenient search capabilities!
- Easy login to your subscription wherever you have a Web connection!
- One extra issue!

Share this newsletter with your entire staff with a Group Online Subscription. Contact sales@magnapubs.com for more details.

Submission Guidelines:

Please review the author's guidelines at our website or contact the Editorial Department at editor@magnapubs.com or (608) 227-8120.

**Don't miss another issue subscribe today! Visit www.magnapubs.com/teachingprofessor
And don't forget to visit Maryellen Weimer's Blog at www.teachingprofessor.com/blog**



MAGNA

**Magna Publications, Inc.
2718 Dryden Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53704
USA**

www.magnapubs.com