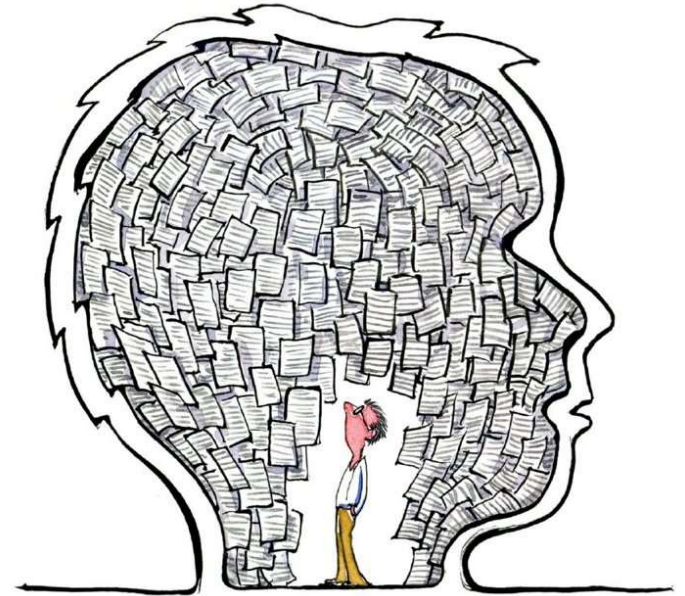


Writing Effective Teaching Philosophy Statements

Faculty Mentor Program
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*“One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is **expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.**”*

Eleanor Roosevelt

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What is a teaching philosophy statement?

“A teaching philosophy statement is a **systematic and critical rationale** that focuses on the important components defining **effective teaching** and their **impact on student learning** in the post-secondary setting and is **sensitive to contextual factors**.”

Schonwetter, D.J., Sokal, L., Friesen, M., and Taylor, K.L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 7(1), 83-97.

A good teaching philosophy...

Combines your **BELIEFS** about teaching with your actual **PRACTICE** and helps you set **GOALS** for the future

How I Explain It

A 1-2 page single spaced, personal, discipline-specific essay that includes:

- **Why** do you teach? **How** do you develop **disciplinary thinking** in students?
- A description of the kinds of knowledge, skills, and values that you want undergraduates in your discipline to develop (**what?**)
- An explanation of how you develop those skills as an instructor using specific concrete examples (**how?**) ...**how well?**

Components of a Strong Teaching Philosophy Statement

- Student-centred descriptions of teaching of learning
- Learning outcomes you want your students to achieve
 - Teaching methods/strategies/approaches
 - Specific, concrete examples
 - Impact on learner
- Innovative teaching approaches
 - How you engage and motivate students
- Student-teacher interactions, relationships

First Questions to Consider (meet your neighbour)

Why do I teach?

What do I teach?

How do I teach?

- Under what **conditions** do I learn? Is that different from how others might learn?
- What kind of **student-teacher interactions** do I strive for?

Why/What/How

EXAMPLE

“As an anthropologist, I am interested in **sharing the study of human cultures**, past and present, with my students.

One of my goals is to help students **to better understand themselves by embracing alternative perspectives**. This involves critically thinking about the factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religion, biology, etc.) that affect their own actions and the actions of others.

My objectives as an educator are to have students **engage with course material, expose them to new concepts and ideas, and to motivate learning beyond the classroom.**”

Interactions

EXAMPLE

“I work to **create a sense of community** in the learning environments that I co-create with students ... I always **seek and incorporate in-course student feedback** ... I find that creating the space to hear their opinions and demonstrating that these have value and worth means that **they become engaged and, in turn, get more out of the learning experience.**”

Outcomes

- What **outcomes** do I expect from my teaching?
- **After participating in my classes**
 - What should my undergraduates know?
 - What should they be able to do?
 - What perspectives, attitudes, values should they have?

Example - Skills

EXAMPLE

Computer Science

“The courses I teach are in 3D modeling and animation for games. This means students must learn how to use multiple pieces of **complex software**, they must learn how to see as an artist does—with **accuracy and understanding**, and they must learn **how to problem solve**. Everything they build is a riddle they must answer, and the instructional challenge is getting their artistic and technical brains working together to conquer it. So my teaching **focuses on building proficiency in fundamental skills, and more importantly, confidence.**”

Outcomes/Assessment

EXAMPLE

“From my perspective, much of a scientist’s skill lies in his or her **ability to ask questions**. Thought-provoking questions will inevitably lead students and, in the same way, scientists, to discovery.

To that end, **I create assessments that require students to ask meaningful questions**. Among the most effective is an assignment whereby first year students interview an ‘expert’ in some facet of chemistry to determine...”

Chemistry Professor

Natasha Patrino Hannon, 2007

Example - Skills

EXAMPLE

English

“One learns to write by reading. A poet's work is in conversation with other poets past and present. It is my responsibility to **inspire my students to read, and to guide them in their reading**, and to select for them the works which will be meaningful to their own creative and intellectual endeavors.”

Example - Values

EXAMPLE

Nursing

“...learners who have limited experiences in nursing need assistance to identify relevant issues in health and client care. **My role is to raise their awareness of pertinent issues and to assist them in their examination of these issues.** I anticipate that learners will examine values, beliefs, and attitudes intrinsic to the successful fulfillment of [their] roles and will incorporate those values [into their] professional actions.”

Outcomes

- What **outcomes** do I expect from my teaching?
- After participating in my classes
 - What should my undergraduates know?
 - What should they be able to do?
 - What perspectives, attitudes, values should they have?

Take **5 minutes** to describe this (in full sentences).
Do not let your pen leave the page!

Acting on Your Beliefs

- **Connect your desired teaching outcomes to the things you do (or would do) in class**
 - Use a specific example to illustrate
 - Consider discussing assessment and/or impact

Acting on Your Beliefs

EXAMPLE

“Creative teaching strategies play an important role in cementing student learning and I routinely introduce non-traditional media like journal articles, job descriptions, newspaper pieces and video clips into my classroom. In one particularly memorable and well-received Polymer Chemistry lecture, **I introduced the notion of viscoelasticity to students by showing them a clip of the Food Network’s Ultimate Pizza Challenge**”

Be Specific

EXAMPLE

“One example of a teaching strategy I employed ... is an assignment I called an illness narrative. For this assignment, **students interviewed individuals with a chronic disease to gain an appreciation for the human element, and not just the clinical components of pathophysiology.**”

Share Impact

EXAMPLE

“For me, the highlight of developing and teaching this course has been the **many comments by students that they no longer fear pathophysiology**, and they actually understand how it impacts their nursing care.”

Acting On Your Beliefs

- Let's add some concrete examples to your Teaching Philosophy Statement!
- **What *specific* teaching methods, strategies, approaches do you use in the classroom?**
 - Why do you use them?
 - How do they connect to your outcomes?

Summary: Best Practices Checklist

- **Make it your own!**
- Ground your statement to your discipline
- Be confident and factual
- Be specific (avoid generic statements)
- Cite sources if you include them
- End on a strong note (i.e., don't forget a conclusion)

Questions?

Resources

- Centre for Teaching and Learning website:
<https://teaching.uwo.ca/awardsdossiers/teachingphilosophy.html>
- Schoenwetter, Taylor, Sokal & Friesen (2003)
Teaching Philosophies Reconsidered: A Conceptual Model for the Development and Evaluation of Teaching Philosophy Statements.
International Journal for Academic Development, 7:83-97.
- What is a philosophy of teaching statement?
<http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/writing-teaching-philosophy-statement>