WRITING A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT: DOCUMENTING YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHING & LEARNING

Presented by: Loretta Brancaccio-Taras, Ph.D.
Professor & Chairperson, Dept. of Biological Sciences
Kingsborough Community College

Sponsored by: The American Society for Microbiology
Science Teaching Fellows Steering Committee

Webinar Objectives

Upon completion of this webinar, you will be able to:

• Define the term: teaching philosophy statement
• Become familiar with the thinking used to develop a teaching philosophy statement
• Identify the elements that should be included as part of a well-crafted teaching philosophy statement

Definition of a teaching philosophy statement

• A succinct, clear description of your teaching approach, methods, and expertise (one to two pages)
• A unique statement that results from self-reflection
• Makes evident the “visible & invisible aspects of your teaching”

If you haven’t taught, reflect on:

• what you think you would do
• someone you believe is an excellent teacher

Poll Question

When you hear the term, “teaching philosophy statement”, which smiley most closely matches your reaction?

a. What on Earth is a teaching philosophy statement?
b. I don’t have a teaching philosophy; I just do it. What the heck am I going to write?
c. No problem! It’s just bull no one will read
d. I can’t wait to get started!

Visible & Invisible Aspects of Your Teaching

Your Teaching

Visible Aspects
your actions
your techniques
your routines

Invisible Aspects
your intentions
your beliefs

Reason to prepare a teaching philosophy statement

• Requirement for a job application
• Part of a packet for reappointment, tenure, or promotion
• Item included in a teaching portfolio
Poll Question
Based on a survey of faculty jobs postings, what % request a teaching philosophy or teaching statement?
 a. 30%
b. 40%
c. 60%
d. 80%

Step 1: The thinking.....
• Start at the end
  1. What does a student that leaves your class look like?
  2. What did they learn?
  3. What can they do?
  4. What did you do to help them learn?
  5. What are your beliefs about your role in the classroom?
  6. What does a "good lesson" look like?
  7. What do you value in the classroom? (spend the most time on?)

Poll Question
In the term “teaching philosophy statement”, which word is the most problematic for you?
 a. teaching
 b. philosophy
c. statement

Step 2: The Process of Writing
• Generate a list of ideas in response to each question.
• Prioritize the items in your lists (most important to you to least important to you)
• Think of specific examples for the items you mention

Developing a Teaching Philosophy Statement
Two basic parts:
  1. The thinking process
  2. The process of writing

The Writing Process: Refining & Customizing your Statement
• Get someone to read your teaching philosophy statement
• Ensure it is well written (it is a writing sample)
• Statement should include factors relating to the institution
  • Mission
  • Class size
  • Demographics
  • Specific for the discipline
Questions and Answers

Don’t’s & Do’s of Teaching Philosophy Statements

DON’T’s
1. Rehash the courses you have taught
2. Speak in generalities about philosophy or include empty statements & jargon (love to teach, care about students, think critically, available)
3. State what the reader wants to hear

DO’s
1. Describe how you go about teaching these courses (introductory vs. advanced)
2. Needs to be concrete—grounded with specific examples (course topics, assignments, evaluation [grading], & strategies)
3. Be authentic & own what you write

Example #1
As a teacher of history, I have three major learning goals: to instill the ability to think historically—to appreciate the importance of change over time & the importance of context..; to give students opportunities to do history—to undertake research, weigh evidence, and interpret primary sources, and to provide students with chances to tell history—to write research papers & make classroom presentations that address important historical questions, advance a clear argument, speak to alternative viewpoints, and present compelling conclusions.

Example #2
Doing science entails defining a biological problem or question, addressing the problem through experimentation and interpreting the findings. An inquiry based curriculum offers many opportunities for... creating an atmosphere in which students must take responsibility for their learning. During one three-week segment, my students test the effectiveness of frequently prescribed antibiotics and tackle the issue of evolution of bacterial resistance to antibiotics. Students are immediately immersed in all aspects of science; working in small groups, collaboratively design & conduct experiments, deciding which antibiotics to test and how to best determine whether an antibiotic is effective. After carrying out the experiments, students write articles in the style of popular magazines in which they interpret their experimental results & translate these ideas into everyday language. As a result of conducting these experiments, students rethink the common misconception that it is not necessary to complete a course of prescribed antibiotics.

Example #3
Mission
• To develop students’ competence in written and oral communication, quantitative skills, critical thinking, research, and technological literacy
• To promote life-long learning opportunities in credit and non-credit programs for the traditional and non-traditional student
• To provide a range of services that support student success
• To respond to the educational, cultural, and economic needs of the communities we serve

One of my teaching goals is to ensure students have relevant classroom experiences that reflect workforce expectations. In my Cell and Tissue Culture class, students are responsible starting primary cultures of chick embryo muscle cells. Part of their grade depends on how well they maintained these cultures over the 12 week semester. The lab is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week so that students learn the responsibility involved in maintaining tissue cultures and develop a strong work ethic.

Poll Question
Which is the best statement to include in your teaching philosophy statement about your teaching effectiveness?
a. My student evaluations are consistently high.
b. Students comment I am the best teacher they have had.
c. Students write comments about me on ratemyprofessor.com.
d. All the statements are equally good to include.
Poll Question

Which is the best statement to include in your teaching philosophy statement?

a. I made use of the university’s computer labs to include hands-on data analysis.
b. I consider myself open to a variety of approaches and perspectives when teaching courses, despite my orientation towards quantitative approaches in my research.
c. A good teacher needs to be flexible. I strive to be responsive to the changing classroom dynamic and to students’ particular learning needs.
d. All the statements are equally good to include.

Resources

Poll Question

Which is the best statement to include in your teaching philosophy statement about what you want your students to learn?

a. I teach so that students can learn the skills that will make them successful in the future.
b. I want my students to leave my classroom with basic biological skills that enable them to engage these ideas, making well-considered choices.
c. I run a student-centered classroom and want my students to learn how to think critically.
d. All the statements equally good to include.

Some stories about teaching philosophy statements

- As a department chair reviewing candidate’s applications
- As a mentor to faculty
- As a teacher

Questions and Answers

Q&A