

Developing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Reflections and Aspirations

1. The characteristics which describe the best teacher(s) I have known are...

2. When I teach, I aspire to....



An Example

My primary aim as a teacher is to encourage and facilitate learning. To accomplish this, I see myself as a fellow traveler whose fascination for the subject, and experience with it, should be valuable to my students as together we explore the discipline. Because of our common interest, I presume that we will learn together. Therefore, I expect students will, at times, lead me to new understanding even while I am providing leadership for them. Thus each course becomes "ours" rather than "mine." Increasingly, I see my role as the purveyor of knowledge diminishing while those of mentor and coach become more central to my teaching.

My teaching activities are underpinned by the 4Cs of teaching: commitment to the teaching endeavor, competence in the subject area, comfort with my teaching style, and compassion for my students. In fulfilling these four requirements I find teaching to be both demanding and rewarding. Personal contact with students is essential to my approach. Thus, I maintain an open door policy and encourage students to visit my office at any time. I also make a point of visiting laboratory sessions whenever I can, though with large multi-sectional classes this is not always possible.

My expectations for my students' education have been shaped by the University of Guelph's Learning Objectives. The articulation of these objectives helped me to crystallize in my own mind what it was that I hope to accomplish with my students. The Learning Objectives now provide the foundation on which all my courses have been built. Of greatest importance to me is that my students can think critically, become independent learners and, above all, can respect and appreciate learning.

Despite my firm belief in these stated values and approach, not all students respond favourably to my teaching. Given the changing expectations of university students in recent years, their focus on grades fuelled by the realities of grade inflation, and their feeling that all education must have utility, it is often difficult to convince students that learning neither equates with training nor even with grades. Intellectual rigour has always been integral to sound education and to my teaching. Accordingly, one has to be prepared to accept student criticism as an alternative to acquiescence to their demands for easy passage. What remains paramount is that students are made clear of my commitment to their learning and that I treat each one openly and fairly in my efforts to stimulate that learning.

Source: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/tss/resources/idres/tpstatements.html>

- **What were some of the strengths of this TPS?**
- **How could the TPS be improved?**
- **What do you remember most about the TPS?**
- **What do you want readers of your TPS to remember most?**



An Article about Your Teaching

Imagine that a prominent academic journal wishes to interview you for a special article on effective teaching within your discipline. How would you respond to the following questions?

- **Why is teaching so important to you?**
- **What is one of your “personal best” achievements as a teacher?**
- **What do you find most challenging about teaching?**
- **Who is the best teacher you have known, and how have they influenced your approach to teaching?**
- **If you could give others a gift wrapped box containing the best qualities of your teaching style, what items would you include?**
- **If you wrote a book on teaching, what would be the title? What three main points would you make?**

Adapted from Ellis and Griffin (2000)



Developing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Schonwetter et al. (2002, p. 84) define a teaching philosophy statement as, “a systematic and critical rationale that focuses on the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional context.” ***A teaching philosophy statement clearly and logically communicates what your fundamental values and beliefs are about teaching and learning, why you hold these values and beliefs, and how you translate these values and beliefs into your everyday teaching and learning experiences.*** Developing a teaching philosophy statement (TPS) is often a challenging and rewarding experience that requires time, research and personal reflection.

A TPS is typically 1-2 pages in length (although this guideline may vary with context). It is generally structured: from an introductory statement of your values and beliefs regarding teaching and learning; to a discussion of discipline-specific teaching strategies which demonstrate how these beliefs are put into practice; to future teaching goals which highlight a clear commitment to continuous improvement; and, finally to a conclusion which highlights two or three main points which summarize the TPS and clearly demonstrate your commitment and dedication to teaching and learning. Based on the key components of a TPS identified by Schonwetter et al. (2002), you can begin to organize the *what*, *why* and *how* of your fundamental beliefs and values about teaching and learning as follows:

TPS Component	What? (Beliefs & Values)	Why ? (Literature & Personal Experience)	How ? (Teaching Strategies)	Goals for Future Improvement
Definitions and beliefs of teaching and learning: beliefs about teaching and learning within the context of your discipline				
Views of the learner and student development: personal beliefs about the <i>ideal</i> learner and the role of learner in the learning environment				
Student-Teacher Relationship: personal goals and expectations regarding the role of the teacher and of the role of the learner				
Teaching Methods & Strategies: specific teaching methods applied (e.g. content, activities, assessment)				
Impact: strategies used to evaluate teaching effectiveness and student learning				



TPSs evolve over time; communicate personal philosophical beliefs of teaching and learning; demonstrate a strong connection to scholarly research and literature in higher education; and show a clear commitment to continual improvement. No matter what your experience in higher education, preparing a teaching philosophy statement can be an enlightening experience, which provides direction, meaning and purpose to your teaching and learning experiences. Based on your teaching roles, you can prepare a TPS built upon your fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning in higher education, with a clear focus on your future teaching goals.

If you are planning on pursuing an academic job, most faculty job postings will require a statement of teaching philosophy, if not a full Teaching Dossier. Although TPSs take time, start with key words, ideas and phrases that describe your approaches to teaching and build from there. Have patience - your TPS is certain to evolve with your teaching experience!

Further Questions to reflect upon when preparing a TPS (adapted from Goodyear and Alchin, 1998; Ellis and Griffin, 2000; Schonwetter et al., 2002):

- What is your approach to teaching? What is your teaching style? What teaching strategies do you most often rely upon? Why?
- What characteristics and behaviors describe an effective teacher/learner?
- What characteristics describe an effective university learning environment?
- What are your strengths and skills as a teacher? What strategies have been particularly effective in terms of student learning and engagement?
- What areas of your teaching require improvement? Why? How do you intend to improve?
- What strategies have you used to evaluate and gather feedback on the effectiveness of your teaching?
- What have you learned about yourself as a teacher? Have your students, peers or the instructor provided direct feedback?
- What teaching tasks do you find most rewarding? Which teaching tasks do you find most challenging?
- What is the most significant thing that has happened to you as a teacher?
- What is your proudest teaching moment? Why?
- What teaching moment do you feel most dissatisfied about? How can you improve upon this?
- What are your future teaching goals?

For more information on preparing a Teaching Philosophy Statement and Examples of TPSs online, visit:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/tss/resources/idres/package/d.html>

References:

Ellis, D. and Griffin, G. (2000) Developing a teaching philosophy statement: a special challenge for graduate students. Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development 7: 85-92.



Goodyear, G. and Alchin, D. (1998) Statements of teaching philosophy. In M. Kaplan (Ed.) To Improve the Academy 17: 103-122.

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

Based on the content of today's workshop take a few moments to record some key words & phrases which best describe your teaching philosophy.

What are your fundamental values and beliefs about teaching and learning?

Why do you hold these values and beliefs?

How do you (or will you) translate these values and beliefs into your everyday teaching and learning experiences?