

Statement of teaching philosophy

November 2009

My teaching philosophy is the result of my experience as a teacher and also as a student for more than 20 years, in both the US and Europe. In fact, with both my parents being teachers, school always felt like a second home to me. As a student, I have experienced great teachers, some terrible ones, as well as a lot in between. In my experience, excellent teachers have to be passionate about their subject and striving to instill this same passion in their students. They have to establish a positive class atmosphere by investing time in building a rapport with their students and encouraging active class participation. Moreover, teachers should not just expect respect from the students, but should treat them with the same kind of respect. They should show that they care about the students and are interested in their learning.

During my graduate studies at the University of Southern California, I have been offered the opportunity to work as a research assistant, but I had the chance to be a teaching assistant while at the University of California, Irvine. This experience spanned very diverse classes involving diverse teaching methods. For the intermediate microeconomics class, the discussion sessions focused mostly on solving problems; during the global economy sessions, the focus was on open discussion of issues; finally, the introductory class in probability and statistics was set in a computer lab and required me to introduce students to the statistical package SPSS. Throughout this experience, I tried to incorporate those aspects of excellent teaching that I had experienced myself as a student.

I believe that life-long learning occurs when students are not just being told facts, but are fully involved in the class and can connect to the information presented. Many people say that they did not really understand economics when they took courses in it. My goal is to have my students leave the class understanding the subject and how to apply it to real life. Teaching economics should go beyond teaching a set of facts and definitions. It should teach students an economic way of thinking about problems that will help them as citizens and in whatever career they decide to pursue.

One thing I realized during my teaching experience is how diverse classes can be. There are usually differences in majors, but also a variety of economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The most challenging disparity, however, is the difference in student learning styles. Some students understand things better when they are put in mathematical terms, others prefer a more graphical or intuitive explanation, while others like to have real world examples to relate to. In order to appeal to all these styles, I try to combine problem solving, graphical analysis, data visualization, and news stories during the classes.

In order to get my students interested in the subject matter, I convey my own enthusiasm by talking about my research and other work I am doing related to the topics covered in class. This can help students see how theoretical concepts can actually be applied to real world problems.

It is important for me to set high standards for my students and, as an instructor, this starts with being well prepared for every class. The first step is to set clear objectives for the class, starting with what I think is important for my students to remember long after they leave college. Once these objectives are set, the next step is to develop the means to achieve them, the final result being a curriculum that challenges the students and awakens their interest. It is also very important to make it clear to the students that they need to have a good understanding of the subject matter in order to do well in the class. A teacher should treat students as adults, answering their questions thoughtfully, describing their responsibilities, and trusting them to fulfill these responsibilities. I

write extensive comments when grading exams so that each student understands why credit was deducted and where there is need for improvement.

I believe that creating a class atmosphere congenial enough for students to feel comfortable to express their opinion and approach me with questions is very important because learning is incomplete without questioning. To this end, I encourage my students to contact me frequently as a way to show my concern about their learning. When asking a question in class, I want to encourage them without being patronizing, by waiting until someone offers a possible answer before I explain the concept. Leaving pauses in a presentation also gives the students the opportunity to ask questions if they feel the need to.

One of the things I most enjoy about teaching is personal interaction with students. It is really rewarding to work with students both in class and individually during office hours, and to see them progress. I also take great pride in mentoring students for their research projects and I find that being a mentor teaches me more about research than any single class could. At USC, I have mentored a Master student and a visiting Ph.D. student from Italy.

A tool that I find very powerful in improving my teaching is listening to student feedback. Students' comments on end of semester forms as well as the views they voice in person are a great starting point for future improvements in teaching a course.

I believe that an academic career has two complementary sides: as a researcher, my purpose is to push the frontiers of knowledge further, while as a teacher, I want to awaken my students' curiosity by making them aware of developments at the frontier. As Stephen Brookfield wrote in his book *The Skillful Teacher* (1990), "Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than what it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?". My main goal, the dent I want to make, is to encourage my students to become curious, independent life-long learners, to develop critical thinking skills, and gain an understanding of the world we live in.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

"Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than what it was before you practiced your craft."

Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* (1990).

What kind of dent do I want? Rather, what effect do I have (or am capable of having) on my students and their learning? I attempt to answer these questions in formalizing my teaching philosophy. As a graduate student at Brown University, I have had opportunities to teach a wide range of courses within the discipline of Economics, interact with students whose personal characteristics span a very wide spectrum and receive guidance and mentorship from some of the finest academicians. Needless to say, my evolution as an intellectual has been shaped by these influences and which continue to get reflected in the way I think, execute and evaluate myself as a teacher.

Perhaps the most insightful lesson I learned from my experiences as a student and as a teacher, is that the key to being a successful instructor is to spend enough time reflecting upon one's objectives, means and results. To illustrate my point, consider the act of developing a syllabus for an undergraduate Game Theory course. It might appear that anyone sufficiently familiar with the topics in the area would be able to formulate a curriculum. However, if one were to start at the end, meaning, by asking- 'what is that one thing that I want my students to remember long after they have walked away from the college green?', and then construct a syllabus keeping this question in mind, the result would be completely different. This is because at each stage the instructor would be acutely aware of the fine differences that exist between-(i)things the students should be familiar with (say, the different types of games and the ideas behind major solution concepts); (ii)things the students should learn to do (like set-up a given problem as a rudimentary game) and (iii) things that have lasting value beyond classroom (like, the idea that most socio-economic phenomena can be explained in terms of strategic interactions). Reflecting in this manner affects the way the course is designed, the evaluations are done and most importantly, the delivery of the content in the classroom.

I believe learning is incomplete without questioning. And a classroom must provide an atmosphere congenial enough for students to ask questions. Some questions will be from minds that would go on to challenge the conventional wisdom of the day and some will make the instructor feel like an utter failure. But at all times the intellectual diversity of the class should be respected and promoted. I feel it is a fundamental responsibility of the teacher to promote critical thinking without being imposing and to encourage without being patronizing.

I remember, when I first started teaching, I was far from perfect. A bit of soul-searching made me realize that I was unconsciously emulating the teaching styles of some of my own professors, especially those whose lectures had captivated me the most. And I also realized that that does not work. I need to find my own style- one in which I can be relaxed and confident, because teaching is not only about disseminating knowledge; it is also about persuasive communication. In class, I am a public speaker and must master “the art of influencing the soul by words” as Plato suggested. I learnt to make use of the board, the slides, the hand-outs and my own body-language to achieve my goals of rousing the students’ interest and sustaining their attention in the lecture in particular and in the course in general.

Next important realization was about how diverse classes can be. Some diversity is apparent. For example, I had to lecture to a class populated by humanities majors as well as computer science majors, and which meant I had to be extra careful about the usage of math. I got around by appealing mostly to the intuitive way of thinking about a problem, rather than solving the algebra. Other than differences in majors, students typically come from a variety of cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds and while it is interesting to see how these forces shape a student’s attitude towards learning it also calls for a re-evaluation of the efficacy of the teaching styles employed. More interesting and much more difficult is dealing with the diversity in learning styles, mostly because it is so abstract and elusive. It takes prolonged interaction with students to actually fathom how they learn best- is it by problem solving or is it by visualizing pictures? By contemplating or by experimenting (and getting their “hands dirty”)? The problem becomes harder to solve when one factors in course-specific rigidities (for example, it is near impossible to ‘draw’ in higher dimensions) and the undeniable fact that the instructor also has a specific learning style. I realized that since I am more of a thinking individual myself, my exercises unintentionally appeal more to the abstract thinkers. In the Industrial Organization course that I taught, I forced myself to include some empirical exercises so as to engage the ‘learning-by-doing’ types. Even in lectures, I try to combine slideshows, board-work and discussions in an attempt to engage students who learn visually, vocally or verbally.

Finally, a tool that I feel is extremely powerful in helping one mature as a teacher is- feedback. I cannot say enough about how much I have learnt from my students through what they scribbled on those end of the semester forms or voiced their views in person. At times they helped to draw me out of the intricate labyrinth of theorems and get my focus back on the bigger picture. At other times, they bolstered my confidence by suggesting how I have inspired them to apply to graduate schools to pursue economics. Through their praise and criticisms, they have made a much better instructor of me. Other ways in which one can continue to improve is by observing senior professors, colleagues as well as lecturers in other disciplines, as this allows one to contrast different teaching styles.

To conclude, I would like to say that an academic has two complementary sides: as a researcher, I am bound to follow the frontiers of knowledge and help in pushing them forward, and as a teacher, my duty is to make the young minds aware of these developments happening at the frontier. When I look at it in this way, I see how much of sharing my work, or the works of others in my fields, with my students can be a rewarding experience and I understand why I have always wanted to join academia.

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March 2009



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Statement of Teaching and Learning

My philosophy and approach to teaching is the result of my experiences as a teacher and as a student, as well as interactions with colleagues. My first formal teaching experience came when my undergraduate advisor requested that I tutor a student in my research lab who was struggling in a chemistry course. As a Masters student, I taught two different introductory biology labs with lecturing responsibilities and a senior/graduate level aquatic ecology lab. During the past four years as a Ph.D. student I have taught a senior/graduate level stream ecology lab. I have also taken the opportunity to work with grade-school students, teaching two separate outreach courses on aquatic ecology over the past three years. Finally, I have given guest lectures in two separate senior/graduate aquatic ecology courses (enrollment ranging from 25-160 students). These experiences have provided the foundations for effective teaching and for inspiring the desire to learn in my students, as well as solidified my interest in placing an emphasis on teaching and mentoring in my academic career.

As an educator, it is my responsibility to create an environment that allows a group of students with diverse learning styles to maximize their potential to retain the information and apply it to real world situations. I do this by incorporating time for students to engage in hands-on exercises, actively participate in small group discussions, and interact on a one-on-one basis with me during class. I also try to incorporate outside materials such as research or news articles, or demonstrations. As an example, I was talking to a freshman biology class about the transmission of diseases and used a participatory demonstration to demonstrate how easily a disease could get transmitted through a population. At the end of the demonstration I overheard one of the students under their breath say "wow." It is likely that this simple demonstration had a far more significant impact on that student than just giving a classic "lecture."

I believe that life-long learning occurs when students can connect to the information presented. I strive to create a personal connection with the students in my class by incorporating my research and life experiences into the lectures. I feel that these conversations help the students connect with me on a personal level and, as a result, become more engaged in the classroom. I also try to learn about individual students so I can tailor course materials to the students. Finally, I try to demonstrate the real-world applicability of the topics that we are discussing. For example, in a recent lecture on nitrogen saturation in aquatic ecosystem, I spent some time talking with the students about how this issue influences the general public. After this discussion, I was thrilled to have a few students recognize how a recent news article, that I had not seen, was related to the discussion we had in class and initiate further discussions with me as a result of this article. Talking about more than facts and figures allowed the students to critically analyze information that they absorbed on a daily basis and understand how it related to the basic ecological principles we were discussing in class.

I am always amazed at the eagerness of young children to share their opinions and participate in class and in turn I strive to create an environment where students actively participate in the educational process. One of the best ways to teach science is to actually do science. In my teaching, I emphasize three core ways for the students to participate in the scientific process: (1) asking questions, (2) doing research, and (3) communicating ideas. During class I try to empower the students to ask questions and communicate ideas by being supportive, encouraging interactions, and building a rapport with the students. I also believe in placing an emphasis on students learning about science by conducting individual and group research projects (field, lab, or literature based).

Outside of the classroom, I take great pride in mentoring students at all levels and look for ways to provide students with research opportunities. The research opportunities that I had as an undergraduate

student were critical in my decision to go to graduate school. I learned more about the process of doing science (asking questions, designing experiments, collecting data, writing papers, and presenting results at scientific meetings) through these experiences than any single class could have taught me. Because I view this as such a valuable experience, I have mentored a NSF REU student as a graduate student and also try to incorporate my undergraduate assistants into my research so they have a better idea of the research that I am doing, and the scientific process in general.

Becoming an effective teacher is a lifelong process and I am always striving to find ways to stimulate learning and intellectual growth in my students. I have found that students can provide timely and critical feedback. In addition to reflecting on the end of the semester feedback, I have used anonymous feedback during the semester to help me adapt to the class. This formative assessment was critical when I first started teaching and allowed me to address comments such as "talking too fast" or "not allowing enough time to take notes" while I was still teaching the class. I also believe that, as educators, we can learn a lot from one another and actively seek out interactions (both formal and informal) about teaching techniques and how to most effectively present material.

Stephen Brookfield in his book, The Skillful Learner, wrote "Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative question of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?" This idea plays a fundamental role in my teaching philosophy. At its roots my teaching philosophy emphasizes empowering students to become active life-long learners, develop critical thinking skills through learning about science by doing science, and gain a fundamental understanding of the environment we live in. I view the measure of my success as a teacher by not just my students grasping the concepts but rather taking that information and applying it in their everyday lives.

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A Modified Version of My Philosophy of Teaching

Faith O. Mowoe

Literature

The Ohio State University

Why and How We Teach Literature

As I read the Timothy J. Clutter and Jim Cope critique and response in "*Beyond Voices of Readers: A Dialogue Between Teachers*" (February 1998), I felt like playing the role of moderator, to bring the two to the table and help them see just how right they both are. I understand Cope's argument perfectly because I am also a strong advocate for Louise Rosenblatt's transactional approach to the teaching of literature. And, like Clutter, I believe that there are great works that transcend time in the consideration of their themes. The problems, as I see them, are two-fold: why do we teach these works? and how do we teach them?

It is not enough to teach selections from the pantheon/rubric of "classics" just because they have been so designated, because they have acquired a place on the pedestal of cultural knowledge to which ever mortal must genuflect and pay obeisance in order to make a case of inclusion into the clique of civilized human beings. In other words, the teaching of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, for example, will be boring and tortuous to students if the sole reason for its being taught is because it is now a "classic." In the same issue of *EJ*, "Bridging the Gap: Integrating Video and Audio Cassettes into Literature Programs," Avery, Avery, and Pace encourage us to "relate literature to the real world by motivating students to defend their opinions on current social issues." And that is how it should be. What better time to engage students in an in-depth understanding of the troubles in Northern Ireland than that which is presented when one is teaching *Portrait*? Imagine the wonderful opportunity presented for the examination of colonialism and racism by discussions on James Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*! If we want to make our students lifelong readers, we have to make them *own* what they read. We have to engage them by giving them the tools with which to conduct independent research in order to better broaden their understanding of assigned works, be they "classic" or contemporary.

I do not think the issue is one of either/or. It is *both*. We need the dual approach of Cope and Clutter to successfully teach and enjoy a subject about which we care so much and defend with such passion.

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Philosophy of Teaching Statement

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Graduate Teaching Associate Department of Psychology
Winner of the 2005 Graduate Associate Teaching Award

As an instructor of an introductory psychology course, the majority of my students are non-psychology major freshmen. Furthermore, for most of these students, this may be their first and perhaps the only psychology course they will take in college. With that in mind, I have three main objectives for their learning experiences: 1) to facilitate the appreciation for the science of psychology, 2) to provide fundamental knowledge and tools applicable to students' pedagogical career, and 3) to enhance self-awareness and understanding of the world around them and the people in it. The way I actualize these objectives is by allowing the various aspects of who I am, professionally and personally, to synthesize as I take an active role in my students' learning. My students not only see the teacher in me, they also see the counselor who is sensitive to the psycho-social-cultural context within which they learn, the researcher who is abreast of the current research and shares a healthy sense of skepticism by the need for scientific explorations, but most of all, they see a person who is simply passionate about what she is doing.

TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY

I believe that students do not come to class as blank slates and often bring with them preconceived notions about the field of psychology. These preconceived notions may consist of false assumptions, generalizations, and ideologies that manifest into a lack of appreciation and understanding for the science of psychology. As a teacher, a psychologist in-training, and a researcher, it is important for me to acknowledge that but to also provide students with a well-informed view of psychology. However, before I can challenge them to think differently, I must first help my students see the relevance of psychological concepts in their lives. I bring psychology to life by providing examples students can grasp based on what they know of the world. I take big theories down to possible answers to every-day life questions (i.e., why have you chosen the friends you have? why do we conform to societal norms?) to make the connection between the textbook and real life issues. Demonstrations and activities are used to help students "see, feel, and touch" what psychology is all about.

Because they are not blank slates, I invite students to utilize their life experiences when learning the course material. I involve students in activities, ask for examples from their lives, and allow time for reflection and reactions to the material. For example, to illustrate concepts of gender differences, gender roles, and societal influences, I engage my students in the "Are men really from Mars and women from Venus?" dialogue. As students arrive to class that particular day, all the men are given blue-colored paper and the women given pink-colored paper. Members of each sex are asked to sit on separate sides of the room. I then ask them to write on their paper answers to questions such as, "Which is the better sex? Which sex has it easier? How did the 'color-coding' make you feel?" and to provide rationale for their responses. Written comments are shared and each sex gets to respond to the answers of the opposite sex. I then bring in knowledge from research to contextualize the discussion and demonstrate how psychologists scientifically explore answers to such questions. If I can help students see the relevance and the value in what they learn in class, the desire to learn and to be challenged would not be something forced upon them. Rather, as I have found through my teaching experiences, once students are engaged and excited about the material, they will begin to proactively ask questions, think critically, and search for connections and relevance on their own. All the while they gained a better understanding and appreciation for psychology as a scientific study.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROCESS

I believe that the learning process is best when it is collaborative between students and the instructor. It is my expectation that students not only learn from me and from each other, but that I learn from them as well. The connection and energy established between my students and me is a powerful teaching technique that I utilize in creating an optimal learning experience. By sharing with them my teaching objectives, students know that I

am invested in them. My role as the instructor is not only a source of knowledge, but also a source of support and an avenue for other resources. Students can expect that I am approachable, available to answer questions, and genuinely invested in their academic success. I strive to be student-focused, competent, flexible, and aware of uniqueness amongst my students. I always arrive to class 15 minutes early to chat with my students and spend the first 5 minutes of class checking in on how they are doing. I get to know my students as people. I learn their names, the sports teams they play on, upcoming job interviews, and the list goes on. It is heartwarming when students come to class early simply to share exciting news with me and/or just to chat about their day. It is also an amazing feeling when a student in an attempt to articulate a particular thought says to me, "Well, you know what I mean, Miss Lee. You understand us." and the fact is I think I just might.

As I have learned through my teaching experiences, my role as a teacher shifts throughout the learning process. I try to find that balance between having a more directive active lead and having a more facilitative observer role. Depending on the course material, class dynamics, and student needs, the shifting of roles continues throughout the course. There are certainly times to teach and times to let the learning take place on its own. With that in mind, I frequently use myself as a springboard for illustration of concepts and catalyst for difficult dialogues. When appropriate, I use my personal experiences to help students grasp the information, make the connection between the text and real life, and also to challenge my students to reflect on their thoughts and behaviors. More specifically, when we talk about stereotypes, I ask my student to share the stereotypes they thought of upon first meeting me. I ask if and how those judgments have changed based on our interactions. With the relationship that we've developed and the safe learning environment we've created as foundation, students are able to be honest in their responses. As they share the prejudgments and false assumptions they had made (i.e., my lack of fluency in English, my outstanding math ability), experiences of dissonance often result. I then take a step back to allow them to grapple with their discomfort as they self-reflect. These difficult dialogues and self-reflections, I believe, can teach my students in levels far beyond mere textbook explanations.

LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

I challenge my students to broaden their minds by enhancing their awareness of culture, diversity, and individual differences. By asking students how applicable a concept is across different cultures, I challenge them to think critically. For example, in the "Are men really from Mars and women from Venus?" dialogue described above, students are asked to think about issues such as societal pressure faced by those who may not adhere to the traditional gender roles, gender role differences among cultures, and the social-cultural changes that can take place over time. When we talk about how stereotypes can positively and negatively impact how we treat and interact with one another, I challenge them to apply what they've learned to their future interactions with others. It is very rewarding when students tell me that they now think differently and how they have used a concept learned in class to explain a particular situation in their lives. These personal applications of the knowledge gained speak volumes to the learning that takes place in my classroom.

Furthermore, my positive energy and excitement exhibited while teaching help facilitate student learning within and beyond the classroom. I believe my presence in the classroom exudes my passion for what I am doing. I feel blessed to have a role where the various aspects of who I am can synthesize. As some students have shared with me, the passion they see that I possess serves as inspiration and motivation for them to find their passion. It pleases me to see that I have a positive impact upon my students, simply by being who I am.

In the past three years of teaching, I have come to find that the three objectives I have set as an instructor of an introductory psychology course are ultimately what I would set regardless of the course I teach. My ultimate goal as an instructor is to essentially create a rippling effect in the lives of my students. Not only do I want them to gain concrete knowledge in psychology, more importantly I want them to apply the knowledge they have gained from their participation in my course into their own personal and pedagogical endeavors. I hope that the learning experience would positively influence how they view themselves and the world. A lofty goal to some perhaps, but a goal I believe in wholeheartedly and one that will continue to motivate me. This has been an extremely rewarding journey and one which I plan to continue on indefinitely.

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March 27, 2003

What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter?

By Gabriela Montell

Since last fall, Peter J. Alaimo has applied for 25 academic positions -- all of them at four-year colleges and universities. In every instance, he's been asked to submit a statement explaining his philosophy of teaching.

"I don't think I saw an ad that didn't ask for one," says Mr. Alaimo, a postdoctoral fellow of chemical biology at the University of California at San Francisco.

At a growing number of institutions, departments are asking job candidates to include statements of teaching philosophy in their application packets. But many applicants say they feel at sea when they try to write one. And members of hiring committees say the statements are merely a way to send a message about the importance of teaching but are rarely a deciding, or even serious, factor in the hiring process.

If they are a deciding factor, the statements are more likely to hurt a candidacy than to help it. "It's not only a job-application hoop to jump through," says Bill Pannapacker, an assistant professor of English at Hope College in Michigan. "but another potential stumbling block. Someone on the hiring committee could use the document to weed you out of the competition over some philosophical issue that may have no real bearing on the kind of teaching you do."

Candidates have no way of knowing how their statements will be used in the hiring process; for them, the main difficulty is just writing one. "It was definitely the hardest part of the application for me to put together," says Megan Frost, a Ph.D. candidate in chemistry at the University of Michigan who is on the academic job market. (For advice on how to write a teaching statement, and a list of dos and don'ts, [click here](#).)

Most Ph.D.'s are produced by research universities, but most academic job openings are at teaching-oriented institutions, says Gene C. Fant Jr., chairman of the English department at Union University. That disjuncture is driving search committees at many

institutions -- especially liberal-arts colleges, comprehensive state universities, evangelical colleges, and community colleges -- to ask applicants for their philosophy on teaching.

He finds the statements useful in the search. "Some employers have had really bad experiences with people who are good researchers and lousy teachers," Mr. Fant says. Statements of teaching philosophy provide a way to weed out people who aren't committed to teaching or who are only interested in working at a four-year university or community college because they didn't get a job at a Research I, he says.

"We had a couple of searches last year [at Mississippi College], and it was one of the things we really looked at," says Mr. Fant, who was chairman of the English department there at the time. "We threw out the applications that lacked good statements, and then, when we had our finalists, we really pored over their teaching philosophies. We actually had them on the table in front of us when we were interviewing candidates, and we asked them questions based on their statements."

At small, private, liberal-arts colleges, such statements are more likely to make or break someone's candidacy, says Andrew Green, a Ph.D. counselor in the Career Center at the University of California at Berkeley. "The major selling point of those colleges is that students will be taught by cutting-edge professionals in an intimate setting, rather than in a lecture hall where they're one of hundreds of students."

But not every institution takes these teaching statements so seriously.

"I can't think of a single time when we used a teaching philosophy to rule somebody out," says Brian Wilson, chairman of the department of comparative religion at Western Michigan University. "Western is very interested in building its graduate programs and retaining its Carnegie status as a research-intensive university, so the ethos here is really that research and writing are probably the most important things a person brings. Teaching is a close second, and nobody discounts that, but if we see potential for teaching, then we think this is a person who can be nurtured and taught."

Even at colleges that rely heavily on the statements, some academics are skeptical of their value.

Michael Westmoreland, an associate professor of mathematics at Ohio's Denison University, doesn't think they are a good tool for

diagnosing the teaching potential of applicants. "If it were up to me, I wouldn't ask for statements of teaching philosophy, because I've yet to have an experience in which a statement gave me any information, unlike other things in the packet," he says.

The problem, some professors say, is there's an absence of criteria about what constitutes a good teaching statement, not to mention good teaching. In fact, few professors were able to give concrete examples of what they considered a bad statement, but most said they knew one when they saw it.

"I'm not so sure we really know what we're looking for when we ask for teaching philosophies," says Joanna Bosse, an assistant professor of ethnomusicology at Bowdoin College. "I certainly struggled with mine. In fact I don't think I've ever succeeded in writing a very good statement of teaching philosophy. The job that I got was one that I didn't have to write one for, so that may be indicative of the kind of larger problem with it."

You can tell that someone is a good researcher if they have an established research record, but it's much harder to evaluate them as a teacher until you've seen them in action, says Richard Lundgren, a professor of mathematics at the University of Colorado at Denver. "Teaching excellence requires more than reflecting on what it takes to be a good teacher. You really won't know how good a teacher they are until you hire them and see how it goes at your particular institution with the mix of students that you have."

So do critics see any value to these statements? Mr. Lundgren says requiring applicants to write them does send a signal about the importance of teaching. "It's a gesture to say that we value teaching," agrees Mr. Pannapacker of Hope College. "But it's not only for the candidate. I think it's internally as well, so that the faculty who are primarily teaching faculty, rather than research faculty, feel validated and included in the hiring process."

To Mr. Westmoreland, a candidate's teaching statement is really just an indication of whether he or she is thinking seriously about the teaching aspects of the job.

Some professors argue that asking job applicants to produce teaching philosophies is premature. Young Ph.D.'s, fresh from the research-intensive training of their doctoral programs, may be least prepared to write cogently on their philosophy about teaching.

"I find it a puzzling thing to ask a beginner to produce," says Deborah Ball, a professor of education at the University of Michigan. "As a veteran elementary teacher, I would have to work

hard to try to represent what I think and try to do, but I cannot really see how the beginning teachers with whom I work could do this well yet."

Ms. Bosse agrees. It makes more sense to use a statement of teaching philosophy in the tenure process, because "at that point you're in a particular job with a certain kind of student body and a certain set of goals that are tailored to individuals, so you have a specific context in which to discuss your teaching."

In fact, teaching statements are becoming a common component in the dossiers of junior professors up for promotion. Barbara Bowers, a professor of nursing and chairwoman of the social-studies divisional committee at the University of Wisconsin at Madison says her committee requires them.

"We view it as a tool to encourage faculty members to improve their teaching early in their careers," she says. "We used to think people were born good teachers -- you either are or you aren't -- and we know now that's not true. People can learn to be good teachers. So the purpose of the teaching statement is to be self-reflective, to identify where you might need some help from others, or you might need to do a little more work on your own to improve, and to look at which of your strategies are effective and which ones aren't."

Where job candidates typically write a page-long statement, at the tenure level, the document is longer -- perhaps three to five pages or more. It serves as an abstract that's going to have evidence -- sample examinations, syllabi, course evaluations -- appended to it, says Brian Coppola, a chemistry professor at the University of Michigan. "It's really a Rosetta Stone for the dossier that's being presented" related to teaching.

For example, it may help the committee to put a candidate's course evaluations into context. "We realize that it's nice for teachers to get good reviews from students, but, in fact, sometimes teachers who get mixed reviews may actually be better teachers," says Ms. Bowers. "Maybe they're less entertaining, but a bit more demanding. Reviewing a candidate's statement of teaching philosophy may help us to see what's really happening."

However, many professors say that a teaching statement is unlikely to make or break a faculty member's tenure case. "There are so many other factors to consider," says Mr. Pannapacker of Hope College. "I think a teaching statement is pretty low down on the scale. There's your publications record, student-teacher evaluations, annual reports from department chairs, and they're

likely to weigh much more heavily." By contrast, in the hiring process, he says, the statement might be more influential because "there's less material to look at. The teaching statement is one out of maybe 10 pages or so of material, whereas a tenure candidate's dossier is as thick as a book."

Like many job candidates, Mr. Alaimo of UCSF has mixed feelings about statements of teaching philosophy. He's been on 10 interviews so far, and he believes he wouldn't have landed them if not for his teaching statement, which he worked on for two months. "Coming from a major research institution, I don't think I would have gotten the interviews at four-year colleges had I not had what I hope is a pretty good statement of teaching philosophy." Even so, he says the next time around he'll spend less time on his statement and more time on things that are more likely to be pivotal in the hiring process: "I have the sense that the teaching philosophy is sort of this wishy-washy document, and it's really not clear how anyone uses it."

Academics may disagree on the importance of teaching statements, but they agree on one thing: Even if you're not asked for such a statement in the hiring process, you should write one.

"It's worth having," says UC-Berkeley's Mr. Green, even if it isn't pivotal in a search. At some point in the job-search or tenure process, he adds, "the issue of what you do in the classroom is going to come to the fore, and you need to be prepared to discuss it in a coherent manner."

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What is a Philosophy of Teaching Statement?

A philosophy of teaching statement is a narrative that includes:

- your conception of teaching and learning
- a description of how you teach
- justification for why you teach that way

The statement can:

- demonstrate that you have been reflective and purposeful about your teaching
- communicate your goals as an instructor and your corresponding actions in the classroom
- provide an opportunity to point to and tie together the other sections of your portfolio

What is the Purpose of Developing a Philosophy of Teaching?

Faculty and graduate teaching assistants are increasingly being asked to articulate their philosophy of teaching. This request may be in conjunction with the submission of a teaching portfolio for seeking academic positions, or as a regular component of the portfolio or dossier for promotion and tenure. Philosophy of teaching statements are also requested of candidates for teaching awards or grant applications.

Why do teachers need to articulate their philosophy of teaching? What purposes does a philosophy of teaching serve? It has been recognized by many teachers that the process of identifying a personal philosophy of teaching and continuously examining, testifying, and verifying this philosophy through teaching can lead to change of teaching behaviors and ultimately foster professional and personal growth.

In his book *The Skillful Teacher* (1990), Stephen Brookfield points out that the development of a teaching philosophy can be used for several purposes:

Personal purpose: "... a distinctive organizing vision—a clear picture of why you are doing what you are doing that you can call up at points of crisis—is crucial to your personal sanity and morale." (p. 16)

Pedagogical purpose: "Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?" (pp. 18-19)

Gail Goodyear and Douglas Allchin, in their study of the functions of a statement of teaching philosophy (Goodyear and Allchin, 1998), identify another purpose:

"In preparing a statement of teaching philosophy, professors assess and examine themselves to articulate the goals they wish to achieve in teaching. . . . A clear vision of a teaching philosophy provides stability, continuity, and long-term guidance. . . . A well-defined philosophy can help them remain focused on their teaching goals and to appreciate the personal and professional rewards of teaching." (pp. 106–7)

General Formatting Suggestions

There is no required content or set format. There is no right or wrong way to write a philosophy statement, which is why it is so challenging for most people to write one. You may decide to write in prose, use famous quotes, create visuals, use a question/answer format, etc.

It is generally 1–2 pages in length. For some purposes, an extended description is appropriate, but length should suit the context.

Use present tense, in most cases. Writing in first-person is most common and is the easiest for your audience to read.

Most statements avoid technical terms and favor language and concepts that can be broadly appreciated. A general rule is that the statement should be written with the audience in mind. It may be helpful to have someone from your field read your statement and give you some guidance on any discipline-specific jargon and issues to include or exclude.

Include teaching strategies and methods to help people "see" you in the classroom. It is not possible in many cases for your reader to come to your class to actually watch you teach. By including very specific examples of teaching strategies, assignments, discussions, etc., you are able to let your reader take a mental "peek" into your classroom. Help them to visualize what you do in the classroom and the exchange between you and your students. For example, can your readers picture in their minds the learning environment you create for your students?

Make it memorable and unique. If you are submitting this document as part of a job application, remember that your readers on the search committee are seeing many of these documents. What is going to set you apart? What about you are they going to remember? What brings a teaching philosophy to life is the extent to which it creates a vivid portrait of a person who is intentional about teaching practices and committed to his/her career.

"Own" your philosophy. The use of declarative statements (such as, "students don't learn through lecture," or "the only way to teach is to use class discussion") could be potentially detrimental if you are submitting this document to a search committee. You do not want to appear as if you have all of the answers, and you don't want to offend your readers. By writing about *your* experiences and *your* beliefs, you "own" those statements and appear more open to new and different ideas about teaching. Even in your own experience, you make choices as to the best teaching methods for different courses and content: sometimes lecture is most appropriate; other times you may use service-learning, for example.

Sample Statements

The following samples are written by Ohio State faculty and TAs, and are examples of various formats you may choose to use.

Essay format samples:

Elizabeth Allan, School of Educational Policy and Leadership
 Robert M. Anthony, Sociology
 Mahesh Iyer, Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering
 Szu-Hui Lee, Psychology
 Laura Luehrmann, Political Science
 Matthew Maurer, Science Education
 Diana Ruggiero, Spanish and Portuguese
 Christine Sahling, Germanic Languages and Literature
 Leslie Wade, Psychology
 John Wenzel, Entomology
 Deborah Zelli, Anthropology
 Carl Zulaf, Agriculture

Question and answer format samples:

Susan Hannel, Consumer and Textile Science

Creative—poem or extended metaphor

Faith O. Mowoe, Literature
 Jeffrey Stowell, Psychology
 Nancy Tatarek, Anthropology
 Joseph Zeidan, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Samples of teaching philosophy statements from other universities:

Rex Campbell, Professor, University of Missouri [philosophy of undergraduate teaching](#) and [philosophy of graduate teaching](#)
 Aaron Bloomfield, University of Pennsylvania
 Christopher Burrows, University of Pennsylvania
 Gregory Flaxman, University of Pennsylvania
 Don Vaughan, Mississippi State University

Major Components of a Philosophy of Teaching Statement

Each statement of teaching philosophy is very personal by nature. Therefore, it should be up to instructors to decide what components to include in their own statements. However, there are a number of excellent resources to get you started with the writing process at [Guidance for Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement](#).

Other Sites with Information on Philosophy of Teaching Statements

What's Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter? Article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
 Center for Excellence in Teaching at the University of Southern California
 Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University
 The Center for Effective Teaching and Learning at the University of Texas at El Paso
 Teacher Portfolio and Preparation Series at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center (includes philosophy of teaching statements written by language teachers).

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