

Developing a Teaching Statement

A Workshop for Graduate Students and Post-docs

Karen Freisem, kfreisem@uw.edu
Center for Teaching and Learning, 100 Gerberding
<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/>

Guiding Questions:

1. What is a teaching statement / teaching philosophy?

A teaching statement/philosophy:

- Is a short statement about teaching and learning (1-2 pages, single-spaced).
- Explains HOW you teach, and WHY you choose to teach that way.
- Paints a picture, helps the reader “see” you teaching.
- Is reflective and personal. Narrative, first person.
- Does not include references, avoids jargon.
- Is discipline-specific and takes into account type of institution/position.
- Is self-explanatory, capable of standing alone. If you’re in a field where teaching portfolios are the norm, the teaching statement is the centerpiece of the teaching portfolio.
- Is what you’d want to talk about and/or expand on in an interview.

2. What do search committees look for in teaching statements?

- a. *Goals for student learning:*
What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline?
What are you preparing students for? What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?
- b. *Enactment of goals (teaching methods):*
What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods contribute to your goals for students?
Why are these methods appropriate for use in your discipline?
- c. *Assessment of goals (measuring student learning):*
How do you know your goals for students are being met? What sorts of assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why? How do assessments contribute to student learning? How do assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?
- d. *Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of following questions:*
How do your own and your students’ identities (e.g., race, gender, class), background, experience, and levels of privilege affect the classroom? How do you account for diverse learning preferences? How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?
- e. *Structure, rhetoric and language:*
How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structured?

From – “Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy for the Academic Job Search” by C. O’Neal, D. Meizlish, & M. Kaplan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_no23.pdf
Note: CRLT has many example teaching statements online at – <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum.php>

3. How can you get started on your teaching statement?

- a. *Brainstorm*: What kinds of teaching experience do you have?

- b. *Try some freewriting*: “Freewriting” means to write for a limited amount of time without stopping, without editing, and, really, without thinking. It’s meant to let you “get out of the way” of your thinking and can be a great way to jumpstart your work on the teaching statement. Some possible freewriting prompts:
 - Describe a particularly vivid moment you've experienced as a teacher (or as a student)
 - Describe your ideal teaching/learning moment
 - Imagine how a student of yours would describe the learning in your class
 - Consider: What do you want your students to learn? How do you help them learn? What learning challenges do students face – and how do you help students overcome these obstacles?

- c. *Talk about teaching with a peer*: Sharing your teaching thoughts and stories with someone can help you focus your thinking – and can give you feedback on which of your ideas are most compelling.

- d. *Explore resources*:
CIDR’s “Writing a Teaching Statement” Bulletin
<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/files/2012/12/TeachingStatement.pdf>
“Writing Your Teaching Philosophy”, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Minnesota
<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/index.html>

- e. *Give yourself time to write some drafts*: Once you have a draft, ask colleagues in your discipline and/or at the Center for Teaching and Learning for feedback (email: thectl@uw.edu).

4. What do teaching statements look like? Examples...

- Daniel Borrero Echeverry – Physics, Georgia Institute of Technology
<http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/students/tas/awards/previous>
- Misty La Vigne – Astronomy, University of Maryland
<http://www.astro.umd.edu/~mlavigne/teachingphil.pdf>
- Wendy Morrison – Biology, Georgia Institute of Technology
<http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/students/tas/awards/previous>
- Lindsey Waddell – Geological Sciences, University of Michigan
<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpum>

5. Where do you see gaps in your own teaching experience? What can you do next to develop your teaching and/or your teaching statement?

Ways to Continue Developing Your Teaching and Teaching Statement

Opportunities to gain classroom teaching experience:

- 1) Let your interest in teaching be known in your department, or in related departments in which you would be interested in teaching.
- 2) Volunteer to give guest presentations in your advisor's or colleagues' classes: Get feedback from your advisor (if he or she observes), ask a CTL consultant to observe and give feedback, or use a "Minute Paper" at the end of class to get quick written feedback from students.
- 3) Teach at another local college: Many UW graduate students have found opportunities for single-quarter, part-time teaching appointments.
- 4) Apply for a teaching fellowship, e.g.:
 - Huckabay Fellowship -- <http://www.grad.washington.edu/students/fa/huckabay/index.shtml>
 - Program for Interdisciplinary Pedagogy (PIP) -- <http://www.bothell.washington.edu/ias/about/pip>

Making the most of any classroom teaching you do:

- 1) Gather feedback about your teaching: Gathering other kinds of feedback – in addition to your end-of-quarter evaluations – can help you present a more complete picture of your teaching. You might consider:
 - *Collecting midterm feedback from your students*. The CTL can help you in gathering feedback: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/gathering-student-feedback/>
 - *Asking a peer to observe your teaching*. A peer's observation letter can be a strong addition to your teaching portfolio. For hints on peer observation, see: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/collaborating-with-colleagues-classroom-observations/>
 - *Asking committee members or other faculty advisors to observe your teaching*. Even if your advisor won't have time to write up an observation letter to include in your portfolio, they will at least be able to include reflections on your teaching in their recommendation letters for you in the future.
- 2) Record written reflections about your teaching: Even if it's just jotting down a quick note to throw in your "drop box," having some written record of your reflections on a class can be an invaluable resource when it comes time to compose your teaching statement. Some instructors even choose to keep a regular teaching journal, in which they record their thoughts after every class.
- 3) Save assignments, handouts, tests, student papers, and student feedback: Keep anything that might later serve to illustrate who you are as a teacher.

Other (non-classroom) opportunities:

- 1) Consult with the Center for Teaching and Learning: To request a consultation, email: thectl@uw.edu
- 2) Create a teaching “drop box”: Designate someplace as a “drop box” for potential teaching statement materials and ideas. Use it to collect handouts from teaching workshops, copies of assignments and syllabi from classes you observe, or ideas you have for courses you’d like to teach.
- 3) See the Careers Section in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In particular:
 - “Good Teachers Wanted” <http://chronicle.com/article/Good-Teachers-Wanted/45636/>
 - “What’s Your Philosophy on Teaching, and Does it Matter?” <http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Your-Philosophy-on/45132/>
 - “How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy” <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/>
 - “4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy” <http://chronicle.com/article/5-Steps-to-a-Memorable/124199/htm>
- 4) Explore teaching journals and websites, e.g.
 - Science Education Resource Center at Carleton College (SERC) -- <http://serc.carleton.edu/index.html>
 - *Teaching Sociology* -- <http://www.asanet.org/journals/ts/>
 - See list of teaching/learning periodicals -- <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning/>
- 5) Participate in departmental and campus-wide teaching workshops: Consider compiling a page listing your “efforts to improve teaching” activities to include in your portfolio.
- 6) Participate in UW's Annual TA/RA Conference (September 16 -18th, 2013): Attend conference sessions or apply to become a session facilitator. Full conference program and link to facilitator application will be posted soon at: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/programs/ta-ra-conference/>
- 7) Participate in other teaching/learning conferences:
 - UW’s Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium (April) -- <http://depts.washington.edu/sotl/symposium/index.html>
 - CIRTL Forum (for STEM disciplines – last conference October 2011) -- <http://www.cirtl.net/Forum2011/>
- 8) Participate in outreach opportunities in your college or department:
 - Genome Sciences Education Outreach website -- <http://chroma.gs.washington.edu/outreach/>
 - Engineering Discovery Days -- <http://www.engr.washington.edu/alumcomm/openhouse.html>
 - Become a Science Communication Fellow for Pacific Science Center Portal to the Public: <http://www.pacificsciencecenter.org/Portal-to-the-Public/portal-fellows.html>
- 9) Connect with others interested in teaching and learning:
 - Biology Education Research Group (BERG): <http://uw-berg.wetpaint.com/>
 - Center for Teaching and Learning – Faculty and Professional Learning Communities: <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/programs/learning-communities/>
- 10) Tutor: Your department may have its own study or writing center, and campus-wide tutoring centers include CLUE, the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity Instructional Center, and Women in Science and Engineering.
- 11) Observe other instructors: Observing others teach can help you articulate how you would approach teaching similar classes. And, if teaching large classes may be in your future, you can ask if it’s possible to attend a TA meeting to get a sense of how instructors work with TAs.
- 12) Ask for feedback on the quality and clarity of your research talks or seminar presentations (that is, rather than only discussing the quality of the research itself.)
- 13) Visit local colleges: Contact faculty in your discipline at other institutions to arrange informational interviews and to observe classes. Participate in the Graduate School’s visits to community colleges (first week of May).