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▶ Writing a Meaningful Statement of Teaching Philosophy

▶ Developing a teaching philosophy statement allows you to reflect on and articulate your beliefs and practices as a teacher. The most meaningful statements of teaching philosophy identify sophisticated goals for teaching and describe varied methods for meeting them. They consider the relationship between teaching content and teaching skills and demonstrate an understanding of student learning. At their best, they are intellectually revealing; rather than simply describe your teaching experience, they demonstrate how you think about your teaching.

▶ Gail Goodyear and Douglass Allchin assert that a teaching statement can help provide a guide or focus for your teaching. When shared with colleagues -- or potential colleagues -- "the statement can serve as an occasion for professional dialogue, growth, and development." Thus it may also contribute to the valuation of teaching as a scholarly activity: public and available for review.

Preparing to Draft

As you prepare to write, reflect on your goals for teaching in your discipline or area of expertise. In determining your goals, consider not only your content objectives, but also the ways of thinking or the intellectual skills you want your students to learn. (In fact, students learn facts and arguments by using or reasoning about them, integrating them into larger structures of knowledge.) You may also want to acknowledge the more expansive habits of mind or being you want them to adopt.

In his guide to writing a teaching statement, Lee Haugan advises writers to consider their methods for meeting those objectives. How do you run your classes? What variety of in-class activities and assignments do you design and what do they ask students to do? Haugan also advises writers to consider their effectiveness as teachers. What evidence do you have of your students learning from their work?

As you respond to these questions, we encourage you not to lose sight of the disciplinary context of your teaching. This may mean illustrating your statement with specific examples, or even a critical incident, from your teaching. You want to take into account pedagogical debates about what and how to teach in your field. You may also want to think about the following questions, prompted by the research on what facilitates and impedes learning:

- What conceptions or misconceptions about concepts or inquiry in your field do students bring to your classroom? How do you build on, unsettle, or correct those beliefs?
- How do you get your students interested in or intellectually engaged with your field? What kinds of questions do you ask or problems do you pose to your students?
- How do you develop your students' interpretive frameworks, or how do you teach them to approach the objects of analysis in your field? What questions do you teach them to ask, and how do you teach them how to answer them?
- How do you explain or otherwise help students understand difficult ideas or concepts (hydrogen bonding, false consciousness)?
- How do you balance your objectives for your students with their own?
- What particular offering does your discipline make to a student's liberal arts education? How do you help students understand the implications or significance of what they're learning or learning how to do in your classes?

Formatting the Statement