

Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

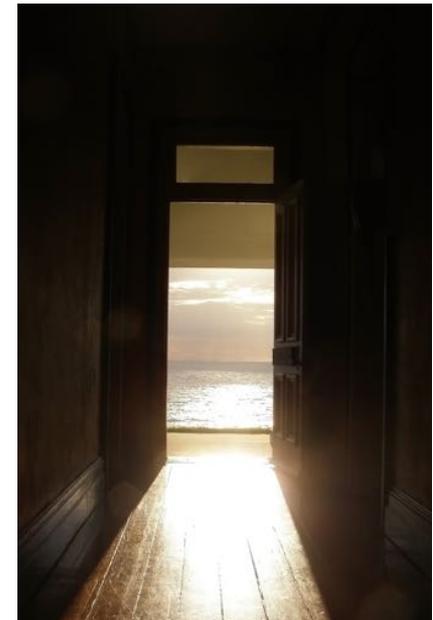
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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

A **narrative description** of one's **conception of teaching**, including the **rationale** for one's **teaching methods**.

Source: Beatty, Leigh, and Dean (2009b), p. 100.

Teachers open the door.
You enter by yourself.
- *Chinese Proverb*



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Narrative Description

- Expresses the process of reflection on teaching and learning, i.e. one's self-awareness as a teacher and one's awareness of students and their learning



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Conception of Teaching & Rationale

- Makes explicit the underlying value(s) that inspire & motivate one as a teacher and the overarching goal(s) to achieve or become in and through teaching and learning



Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Teaching Methods

- Makes explicit the processes or methods through which one and one's students embody & enact values and attain goals in the classroom/course



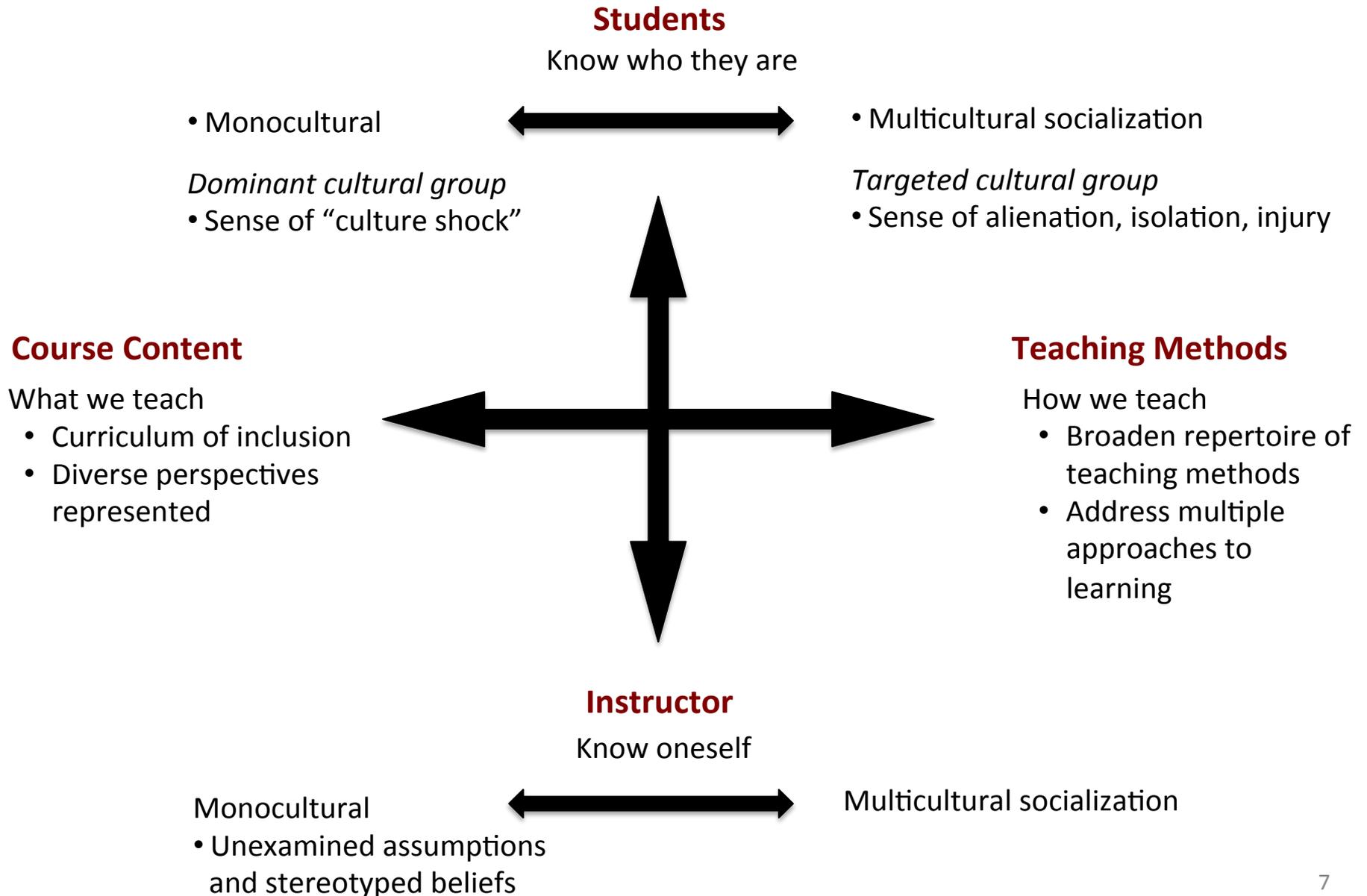
Philosophy

“Anyone setting out to teach has a philosophy of teaching.

Philosophy does not imply anything esoteric or grand.

Philosophy means only **those things we hold to be true about students, about the process of teaching, and about what we should be doing to teach well**. Nothing so complex and unpredictable as teaching should be done without **thinking about it**. And it is from thinking about it, and seeing what others have thought and said about it, as well as actually doing it, that a philosophy of teaching develops.”

Dynamics of Inclusive Teaching



Philosophy

Most fundamentally:

What is your conception of a great teacher, and what are you doing to become one?



Philosophy

More generally:

- Why do I teach?
- What is motivating about my subject/discipline?
- How do I convey my passion for the subject?
- What am I trying to accomplish in my teaching?
- How are my approaches to teaching a reflection of *who* I think I am, of *who* I think my students are?
- Under what conditions do students best learn?
- How do I help students navigate new and different perspectives?
- **What learning goals do I set for my students?** 

The answer to this question should be explicit in the statement.

Adapted from: Johnston (2008).

Teaching Inventories

The following online questionnaires *may* be helpful in stimulating thinking about your teaching philosophy and methods:

Teaching Goals Inventory

http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?-db=tgi_data&-lay=Layout01&-view

Teaching Perspectives Inventory

<http://www.teachingperspectives.com/>

Teaching Style Inventory

<http://longleaf.net/teachingstyle.html>

Statement

Subject/discipline-specific vs. generalized

(recommendation: be specific to your discipline in how you word your learning goals and the methods you use; include appropriate subject content references in your examples, e.g. reference key texts or subjects taught in your field)

Personalized style vs. formal style

(recommendation: be personable unless your discipline or the institution to which you are applying is quite formal)

Personal version vs. official version (personal = any length, just write, write, write what you need to say)
(official version for applications = 1-2pages)

also: consider a “syllabus version” for your students (something short on your approach to teaching; it doesn’t need to be called a “teaching philosophy” on the syllabus)

Concise: 1-2 pages (~800-1200 words) note: the best statements will require two pages; increasingly, though, applicants are encountering one-page limits

Specificity – use concrete examples from the classroom (esp. when discussing methods)

Research Shows...

Successful statements have these qualities:

- Specificity
- Evidence of dedication to teaching
- Indicate writing and communication skills
- Demonstrate thoughtful reflection on one's teaching
- Evidence of student-centered methods
- Convey a match between applicant and hiring institution

Source: Bruff (2007).

Remember...

The **statement** is a **narrative description**

As you write, you might think in terms of this question:

- “If someone looked into my classroom, what would one see?”

For example, a person won't just see “active learning,” a person will see: “students work in small groups of three to identify the terms Hurston uses in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, to transform a hurricane into a ‘monstropolous beast,’ and then they describe the parallels with terms used in news accounts of Hurricane Katrina.”

Statement Elements

5 Important Categories

- **Learning goals:** discipline-specific knowledge, skills, attitudes that are important for students' academic, personal & professional success
- **Teaching methods:** specific teaching methods & how they contribute to students' accomplishment of learning goals & how they align with student expectations & needs
- **Learning assessment:** specific tools used to assess student learning & descriptions of how these tools facilitate student achievement of learning goals
- **Teaching assessment:** strengths and areas for improvement of one's teaching based on evidence, along with plans for continuing development
- **Learning Environment:** specific ways a variety of diverse identities, experiences, knowledges, etc. are accounted for and integrated into teaching methods; the ways an inclusive classroom are cultivated so that students feel they belong and succeed in their learning

Statement Format

(possible approaches)

Five-Paragraph Essay

Great Moments

Great and Not-So-Great Moments

The Story

The Metaphor

For specifics, see Kearns and Sullivan (2011), p. 140

Tips: Consider Your Audience

- Will this candidate be able to handle the teaching responsibilities of the job?
- Does her approach to teaching suggest that she would be a good “fit” for our department and our students?
- Does this candidate want to teach? If so, why?
- If I were to step into a classroom and observe this candidate teaching, what would I see?

Source: Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, Washington University in St. Louis

Tips: Consider Your Audience

- How do this candidate's research interests shape her teaching?
- What will this candidate add to our department? What will our students gain from his classes? What will our department gain in terms of specific courses, new opportunities for students to develop their skills and knowledge, and interesting pedagogical approaches?
- How does this candidate respond to the perennial challenges of teaching, such as motivating students to learn, evaluating student work, maintaining high standards in the classroom, and juggling teaching with other responsibilities we expect faculty to fulfill?

Source: Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, Washington University in St. Louis

Tips: Stand Out from the Crowd!

Begin with the End

- In what way is a student leaving my class different than from the one who entered on the first day?

Make Distinctions *(if they exist...)*

- Note differences in types of classes taught: different objectives, methods, etc.

Source: Lang (2010).

Tips: Stand Out from the Crowd!

Be Specific

- Tell a story or two about how your objectives or methods have played out in the classroom

Note Your Sources

- Where did your philosophy or ideas about teaching come from?

Source: Lang (2010).

Statements of teaching philosophy submitted for the **Kimble First-Year Teaching Award** will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- The statement offers at least one or more **clear, compelling goals for student learning**. (Student learning goals can be formulated by answering questions such as “What knowledge, skills, and attitudes important for students in your discipline?” “What are you preparing students for?” “What are the key challenges of the teaching-learning process?”)
- The statement **clearly connects the articulated student learning goals with specific methods, activities, and assessments** that are imaginative and sound, and have a clear rationale.
- The statement **demonstrates change in teaching practice over time or identifies plans for future change**. (Change over time can be demonstrated by answering questions such as “How is the instructor reflecting and acting on trends in student performance and feedback, or on peer, departmental, campus-wide, or national conversations about teaching and learning to enhance the learning experience for students?”)
- The statement is rhetorically compelling, gives a sense of the instructor’s particular perspective and persona, and offers well-chosen, specific examples.

Possible Components	Excellent	Needs work	Weak
<p>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?</p>	<p>Goals are clearly articulated and specific and go beyond the knowledge level, including skills, attitudes, career goals, etc. Goals are sensitive to the context of the instructor's discipline. They are concise but not exhaustive.</p>	<p>Goals are articulated although they may be too broad or not specific to the discipline. Goals focus on basic knowledge, ignoring skills acquisition and affective change.</p>	<p>Articulation of goals is unfocused, incomplete, or missing.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Enactment of goals is specific and thoughtful. Includes details and rationale about teaching methods. The methods are clearly connected to specific goals and are appropriate for those goals. Specific examples of the method in use within the disciplinary context are given.</p>	<p>Description of teaching methods not clearly connected to goals or if connected, not well developed (seems like a list of what is done in the classroom). Methods are described but generically, no example of the instructor's use of the methods within the discipline is communicated.</p>	<p>Enactment of goals is not articulated. If there is an attempt at articulating teaching methods, it is basic and unreflective.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Specific examples of assessment tools are clearly described. Assessment tools are aligned with teaching goals and teaching methods. Assessments reinforce the priorities and context of the discipline both in content and type.</p>	<p>Assessments are described, but not in connection to goals and teaching methods. Description is too general, with no reference to the motivation behind the assessments. There is no clear connection between the assessments and the priorities of the discipline.</p>	<p>Assessment of goals is not articulated or mentioned only in passing.</p>
<p>Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of the 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 styles? •How do you integrate diverse perspectives into your teaching?</p>	<p>Portrays a coherent philosophy of inclusive education that is integrated throughout the philosophy. Makes space for diverse ways of knowing, and/or learning styles. Discussion of roles is sensitive to historically underrepresented students. Demonstrates awareness of issues of equity within the discipline.</p>	<p>Inclusive teaching is addressed but in a cursory manner or in a way that isolates it from the rest of the philosophy. Author briefly connects identity issues to aspects of his/her teaching.</p>	<p>Issues of inclusion are not addressed or addressed in an awkward manner. There is no connection to teaching practices.</p>
<p>Structure, rhetoric and language: How is the reader engaged? Is the language used appropriate to the discipline? How is the statement thematically structure?</p>	<p>The statement has a guiding structure and/or theme that engages the reader and organizes the goals, methods, and assessments articulated in the statement. Jargon is avoided and teaching terms (e.g., critical thinking) are given specific definitions that apply to the instructor's disciplinary context. Specific, rich examples are used to bolster statements of goals, methods, and assessments. Grammar and spelling are correct.</p>	<p>The statement has a structure and/or theme that is not connected to the ideas actually discussed in the statement, or, organizing structure is weak and does not resonate within the disciplinary context. Examples are used but seem generic. May contain some jargon.</p>	<p>No overall structure present. Statement is a collection of disconnected statements about teaching. Jargon is used liberally and not supported by specific definitions or examples. Needs much revision.</p>

Statement Sample

(for discussion)

Sample thesis for statement:

“The work world is competitive, fast-moving, and sometimes harsh. While I believe in the inherent dignity of every person, I believe it is my responsibility to prepare my students for workplace realities. Thus, my assignments focus on competitive outcomes within a supportive, reinforcing classroom environment.”

Source: Beatty, Leigh, and Dean (2009a), p. 129.

Statement Sample

(for discussion)

Sample thesis for statement:

“My epistemology is that knowledge requires awareness of one’s own values and awareness of others’ values to truly engage with an increasingly diverse world. Knowledge is best created in community, through respectful dialogue with those who may not necessarily agree with you. As such, course assignments include many self-assessments that will form the basis of these conversations, as well as structured opportunities for group interaction around potentially controversial topics.”

Source: Beatty, Leigh, and Dean (2009a) p. 130.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy Worksheet

Basic Conceptions of Teaching

Why do I teach?

What does good teaching mean to me? Similarly, what does effective learning mean to me?

Do I have a particular teaching style or approach? If so, how would I describe it?

What makes me unique as a teacher?

What do I expect from students? What can my students expect from me?

Why am I so passionate about my discipline (or field, profession, etc.)?

Goals for student learning

What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in my discipline? In students' lives in general?

What am I preparing students for?

What are key challenges in the teaching-learning process?

Enactment of goals (teaching methods)

What teaching methods do I use? What strategies make teaching and learning in my discipline come to life?

Why are these methods appropriate for use in my discipline?

How do these methods contribute to my learning goals for students?

Assessment of goals (measuring student learning)

How do I know my learning goals for students are being met?

What sorts of assessment tools do I use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, journals), and why?

How do these assessments contribute to student learning? How do these assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?

Creating an inclusive learning environment

How does my own and my students' identities (e.g., race, gender, class), backgrounds, experiences, and levels of privilege affect the classroom?

How do I help students feel as if they belong in my class or discipline or field or university?

How do I integrate diverse perspectives into my teaching? How do I help students navigate different perspectives, including careful consideration of their own perspectives?

How do I integrate technology in my classroom? How do I extend my class outside of the classroom?

Training, Research, and Contributions in Teaching and Learning

How do I include reference to professional development as a teacher (e.g. training, workshops, etc.)?

How do I include references to research I've done on teaching and learning?

What contributions to how my discipline or field engages in teaching (curriculum or methods) have I made?

Structure, Rhetoric and Language

How is the reader of my statement engaged? Do I use a particular thematic structure or format, such as a story or metaphor?

Is the language I use appropriate to my discipline, field or profession? For the specific institution or committee to which I am submitting the statement?

Is this statement a good representation of my voice?

Exercises to get started...

Table 4. *Summary of teaching philosophy statement writing exercises from the Center for Teaching Excellence of Duquesne University*

Teaching philosophy writing matrix

Consider your beliefs, practices, and future goals in relation to several aspects of teaching: who the learners are, the student-student and student-teacher relationships, the knowledge and skills needed in the field, the methods to impart the knowledge and skills, and the evidence that students are learning. [From Ref. 24.]

Critical moments exercise

Describe three to four critical moments in your courses (e.g., the first day of class, the first “stupid” question, the first exam, and/or the first time the class understands a complex problem), reflecting on how you prepared students for that moment, how you responded to the students during that critical moment, and how you might respond differently when the situation arises again. [From Ref. 12a.]

The four-paragraph model

In four separate paragraphs, describe the following [from Campus Instructional Consulting, Indiana University]:

1. Why do you teach? Where do you get your passion for teaching?
2. What techniques or practices do you use in the classroom to encourage student learning? Name one or two key assignments that you give your students that you think make the biggest impact on their learning.
3. How do you know your students are getting it? What evidence of learning might you present to a search committee?
4. What aspects of your teaching are you working on now? What current learning problems are your students encountering, and how are you trying to ease those difficulties?

The teaching cube

Describe the following six facets of your teaching [adapted by Gail Goodyear, Center for Effective Teaching and Learning, University of Texas:

<http://www.utep.edu/cetal/portfoli/cube.htm>]:

- Learn (What motivates you to learn in this discipline? Why have you chosen your discipline?)
- Act (What happens when you teach? What do you do?)
- Difference (Why does what you do in your teaching make a difference in the lives of others? Why is it relevant?)
- Values (What values do you impart to your students and why?)
- Setting [Why do you develop the learning environment(s) and relationship(s) with students that you do?]
- Enjoy (What are your favorite statements to make about teaching? Why are they your favorites?)

Self-reflective interview exercise

In a creative writing exercise, imagine that you are being interviewed for a magazine article about effective teachers. The following are examples of questions you might address: What is a “personal best” achievement for you as a teacher during the past year? How does your teaching reflect the best teacher you have ever known? What of your worst qualities as a teacher would you throw away? If you wrote a book about teaching, what would the title be? What three points about instruction would you make? [From Ref. 12a.]

Teaching Philosophy Statements

Helpful Articles and Books

Beatty, J. E., Leigh, J. S. A., & Dean, K. L. (2009a). Finding our roots: An exercise for creating a personal teaching philosophy statement. *Journal of Management Education*, 33(1), 115-130.

jme.sagepub.com/content/33/1/115.full.pdf+html

Beatty, J. E., Leigh, J. S. A., & Dean, K. L. (2009b). Philosophy rediscovered: Exploring the connections between teaching philosophies, educational philosophies, and philosophy. *Journal of Management Education*, 33(1), 99-114. jme.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/1052562907310557v1.pdf

Brookfield, S. (1990). *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (especially chapter two)

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (especially chapters one and two)

Chapnick, A. (2009). How to write a philosophy of teaching and learning statement. *Philosophy of Teaching Statements: Examples and Tips on How to Write a Teaching Philosophy Statement*. Faculty Focus Special Report. Madison, WI: Magna Publications, Inc. (available as a .pdf with membership at www.facultyfocus.com)

Kearns, K., & Sullivan, C.S. (2011). Resources and practices to help graduate students and postdoctoral fellows write statements of teaching philosophy. *Advances in Physiological Education*, 35(2), 136-145.

<http://advan.physiology.org/content/35/2/136.full.pdf+html>

Kearns, K., Sullivan, C.S., O'Loughlin, V.D., & Braun, M. (2010). A scoring rubric for teaching statements: a tool for inquiry into graduate student writing about teaching and learning. *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching*, 21(1), 73-96.

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/6804/final%20teaching%20statement%20rubric.pdf?sequence=1>

Lang, J. (2010). 4 steps to a memorable teaching philosophy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 29, <http://chronicle.com/article/4-Steps-to-a-Memorable/124199/>

Marchesani, L.S., & Adams, M. (1992). Dynamics of diversity in the teaching-learning process: A faculty development model for analysis and action. In M. Adams (ed.). *Promoting diversity in college classrooms*. Vol. 52: *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*. (52), 9-20.

Montell, G. (2003). How to write a statement of teaching philosophy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 27, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133>

Helpful Websites

Teaching Strategies: The Teaching Philosophy/Teaching Statement (University of Michigan)

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/category/tstrategies/tstpts>

Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement (Washington University in St. Louis)

<http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/writing-teaching-philosophy-statement>

Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement (Ohio State University)

<http://ucate.osu.edu/professional-development/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/>

Guidance on Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement (Ohio State University)

<http://ucate.osu.edu/professional-development/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/guidance/>