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.


Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself.

- Chinese Proverb
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Conception of Teaching & Rationale

– Makes explicit the underlying values that inspire & motivate one as a teacher and the overarching goals one has for students’ 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
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
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 and Learning

Philosophy

A basic question:

What is your conception of a great teacher and a great learner?
Philosophy

Key reflective questions:

– Why do I teach?
– How do I establish my presence as a teacher?
– How do I convey my interest or passion for the subject?
– What am I trying to accomplish in my teaching?
– What is motivating about my subject/discipline?
– What are the most essential skills needed to engage as a worker (scholar, practitioner, etc.) in my subject/discipline?
– How are my approaches to teaching a reflection of who I think I am, of who I think my students are?
– How do I build rapport in my class and relationships with and among individual students?
– How do I include my students in the class – their voices, experiences, interests, etc.?
– 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?**

Another way of phrasing it:
What is most important for students to know, do, experience, or feel to be successful learners and practitioners in my discipline or in life generally?

Adapted from: Johnston (2008).
My teaching centers on rigorous questioning: I tell my students that literary texts are sites for inquiry, offering opportunities for us to challenge our thinking through the exchange of ideas. My goal as a teacher of American literature is to equip students with the bravery to inhabit and explore their own uncertainties and ignorance, to provide them with the tools to communicate what stimulates their curiosity, and to build in them the tenacity to interrogate their own thinking.

EXAMPLE learning goals
My goal as a teacher is to create “everyday sociologists”—not necessarily professional sociologists who all attend graduate school and become professors, but rather people who leave the classroom with a new curiosity about why things are the way they are. The most important task of teaching is equipping students with a new way to view the world, through their ability to think critically. They may never remember particular research methodologies or specific facts about the social world, but as long as they are armed with the ability to think critically, make connections between individuals and broader societies, and become more compassionate, analytical, and empowered citizens, who will hopefully challenge existing systems of oppression in their own ways, I have done my job. My teaching practices rest on three core principles 1) create an inclusive, student centered classroom environment 2) provide students with the theoretical tools to place their individual biographies into a broader world history 3) provide students with a comparative historical framework for understanding contemporary issues of systemic inequality.
I want students to succeed on their own journey of discovery and shape the world for the better. I support this intention through the teaching of foundational knowledge, critical thinking, and the skills necessary to facilitate life-long learning. The teaching of mandatory subject-specific information is important for students to gain a foundational understanding of theory and method. But we must also encourage critical approaches to learning, critical thinking that will empower students to take learning seriously and use education to move beyond their circumstances. It is in teaching that we provide students with the experience to tackle issues pertinent to their educational interests and cultivate habits for an actively engaged life.

EXAMPLE learning goals
I teach to give others a greater understanding of the natural world. I have found that with a handful of basic principles one can understand many natural phenomena, and that critical thinking about how these concepts are relevant in life brings about a greater understanding and appreciation of the world in which we live. I teach to bring this appreciation and understanding to students, and to give them the tools and mindset that they need to analyze the nature of the world effectively.

EXAMPLE learning goals
I want my students to learn something new, to be curious about it, and to question their beliefs. To do this I seek to help my students have a firm foundation of the concepts early on, to frame their thinking as researchers, and to develop their critical thinking abilities.
Recalling your key goal for student learning:

What are some learning goals you feel are essential for students to succeed in your discipline?

That is, what is important for students to know, do, experience, or feel to be successful learners and practitioners in your discipline or in life generally?
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” through “discussion,” 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

– **Assessment of student learning**: specific tools used to assess student learning & descriptions of how these tools facilitate student achievement of learning goals

– **Assessment of teaching**: 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
Jason Schreiner, UO Teaching Engagement Program - 2018
**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

Jason Schreiner, UO Teaching Engagement Program - 2018
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).
**Tips:** Show, Don’t Tell!

Be Mindful of Insider Language

- Jargon should be explained and exemplified

Be Mindful of Emotions

- Demonstrate through examples that you “love” teaching, are “passionate” about what you do, “care” about students, or are “inspired” by your students
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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Components</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Needs work</th>
<th>Weak</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals for student learning:</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Articulation of goals is unfocused, incomplete, or missing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enactment of goals (teaching methods):</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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 generally, no example of the instructor's use of the methods within the discipline is communicated.</td>
<td>Enactment of goals is not articulated. If there is an attempt at articulating teaching methods, it is basic and unreflective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of goals (measuring student learning):</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Assessment of goals is not articulated or mentioned only in passing.</td>
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<td>Creating an inclusive learning environment, addressing one or more of the following questions:</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Issues of inclusion are not addressed or addressed in an awkward manner. There is no connection to teaching practices.</td>
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<td>Structure, rhetoric and language:</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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Rubric for Statements of Teaching Philosophy developed by Matt Kaplan, Chris O'Neal, Debbie Meizlish, Rosario Carillo, and Diana Kardia
### Student Learning Goals
Identify three student learning goals that answer the following question: What is most important for students to know, do, experience, or feel to be successful learners and practitioners in my discipline or in life generally?

1. 
2. 
3. 

### Teaching Methods and Examples
Identify at least one method, and one concrete example of that method, for each student learning goal you have listed.

- **Method 1:**
  - Concrete example:

- **Method 2:**
  - Concrete example:

- **Method 3:**
  - Concrete example:

### Learning Assessment
Identify at least assessment (formative or summative) for each student learning goal you have listed.

- **Assessment 1:**
- **Assessment 2:**
- **Assessment 3:**

### Teaching Assessment
Identify 1-3 ways you assess your own teaching or engage in professional teaching development to enhance your teaching.

### Learning Environment
Identify ways you cultivate and maintain the learning environment of your classes, including ways you get to know students, help them interact with each other and you, and how you present yourself.

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Jason Schreiner, Teaching Engagement Program, University of Oregon, 2018
Teaching Statement Review Questions

1. Does the statement articulate student learning goals explicitly? What are they?

2. Are the student learning goals appropriate for the discipline, and does the statement articulate them in a discipline-appropriate way?

3. Does the statement articulate specific teaching methods? Is it clear how the methods connect to and facilitate the learning goals? Are there any methods noted that appear to have no obvious connection to one of the stated learning goals? Are there any learning goals without any obvious connection to methods for accomplishing them?

4. Are concrete examples provided to illustrate the methods? [Can you answer this question: “For this method and/or example, does the description in the statement more or less match what I would see if I was standing in the back of the room observing it taking place?”][Can you also answer this question: “That sounds interesting. Is it clear to me more or less how this works?”]

5. Are there opportunities to insert even more concrete details to enrich the methods or examples that are noted? [For example, if the statement is describing methods/examples from more than one course, is it clear from which course each method/example comes? For the methods/examples, could a quick reference to a specific text (i.e. source of content) be inserted?]

6. Are assignments or assessments (graded or not graded) included? Is it clear what they are and how they work? Is it clear how they connect to one of the learning goals or methods noted?

7. Is it clear how the learning environment of the class is established or cultivated? If the methods emphasize “interaction” or “engagement” or “student-centered,” is it clear how students come to feel empowered or confident to contribute?

8. If “diversity” or “equity” or “inclusion” or related terms are indicated as important (e.g. as an explicit learning goal or in order to bring in “diverse perspectives” or “diverse voices,” etc.), is it clear how the methods/examples or assignments/assessments facilitate this aim? Are there opportunities to be more explicit about how to promote this aim (such as reference to particular texts used or guest presenters or ways to include/highlight diverse student experiences or voices in the class, etc.)?

9. Does the conclusion refer back to the opening in any way – in order to reiterate it, extend it, or otherwise invoke it to make a final, concluding point [especially if a story or anecdote is used in the opening]? Is there an obvious alternative to the current opening/ending – for example an interesting example used that might serve as a more intriguing opening or conclusion?

10. Is the language used – terms, references, etc. – clear? In general, does the statement “tell” me something or is it showing me with examples? Is there jargon that needs explained or exemplified with an example? Are emotional terms present (“love teaching” “passionate” etc.) rather than examples that demonstrate this?
Statement of Teaching Philosophy Brainstorming Questions

Learning Goals
What most interests you about your discipline?

What do you hope students will appreciate about your discipline?

What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important for student success in your discipline?

How are these disciplinary knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to students' academic, personal, and professional success?

Teaching Methods
What do you see as the relationship between the student and the teacher?

What do you see as the respective responsibilities of the student and the teacher?

How are these relationships and responsibilities reflected in your teaching methods?
How do these methods contribute to your learning goals for students?

Why are these teaching methods appropriate for use in your discipline?

What pedagogical resources (disciplinary and general) support your teaching methods?

How are your teaching methods attentive to diverse student expectations and needs?

How do your personal characteristics and values relate to your choice and implementation of your teaching methods?

Assessment of Student Learning
What learning assessment tools do you use (e.g., tests, papers, portfolios, and/or journals) and why?

How do you know your learning goals are being achieved using your teaching methods?
How do these assessments contribute to student learning? How do these assessments communicate disciplinary priorities?

What do the learning assessments say about your teaching?

**Assessment of Teaching**

What do your teaching assessments say about your teaching?

What are your strengths as a teacher?

How will you improve students' achievement of these learning goals?

What aspects of your teaching are you working on now?

**Learning Environment**

How does my own and my students' identities, 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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching philosophy writing matrix</th>
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<tr>
<td>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.]</td>
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<tr>
<th>Critical moments exercise</th>
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<tr>
<td>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.]</td>
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<tr>
<th>The four-paragraph model</th>
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<tr>
<td>In four separate paragraphs, describe the following [from Campus Instructional Consulting, Indiana University]:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Why do you teach? Where do you get your passion for teaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>3. How do you know your students are getting it? What evidence of learning might you present to a search committee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
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<th>The teaching cube</th>
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<tr>
<td>Describe the following six facets of your teaching [adapted by Gail Goodyear, Center for Effective Teaching and Learning, University of Texas: <a href="http://www.utep.edu/cteal/portfolio/cube.htm">http://www.utep.edu/cteal/portfolio/cube.htm</a>]:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Learn (What motivates you to learn in this discipline? Why have you chosen your discipline?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Act (What happens when you teach? What do you do?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difference (Why does what you do in your teaching make a difference in the lives of others? Why is it relevant?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Values (What values do you impart to your students and why?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Setting [Why do you develop the learning environment(s) and relationship(s) with students that you do?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enjoy (What are your favorite statements to make about teaching? Why are they your favorites?)</td>
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<th>Self-reflective interview exercise</th>
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<tr>
<td>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.]</td>
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</table>
These questions are best answered in conversation with a colleague or two.

1. **Describe the best learning experience you have had as a student.** *(This helps to identify how we best learn and reminds us as instructors what it is like to be a student. Maryellen Weimer (2013) recently discussed this in the context of influencing the learning environment)*

2. **Describe the best teaching experience you have had as an instructor.** Are there any similarities to the learning experience you described above? *(This question attempts to link our learning to our teaching.)*

3. **What are you trying to achieve in your students with your teaching?** *(This is a big question and may be best initially answered by thinking about it in the context of what you feel is the course you teach with the most success.)*

4. **Why is this important to you?** *(This helped me to begin articulating my approach to my discipline in the context of teaching. For others I know it becomes larger than the discipline itself and may link to the personal growth of students and not only their intellectual growth.)*

5. **How do you achieve your objectives you wrote down for question #3 above?** That is, what teaching strategies or approaches do you use in your classes that produce the learning environment or opportunities for your students to reach your teaching objectives? *(Hopefully, this has been informed by your answers in questions #1 & 2 above. If there is no apparent connection between this question and your answers to #1 & 2, then this might be cause to pause and reflect why this is.)*

6. **Why do you use these particular teaching strategies as opposed to others that are available to you?** *(This is where you start developing the argument or citing the evidence for the value or success of your approach to teaching. Hopefully, you are able to make links to your own learning philosophy.)*

SOURCE: Neil Haave, “Six Questions That Will Bring Your Teaching Philosophy into Focus,” *Faculty Focus*, June 2, 2014. Found online:  