

Sample Teaching Philosophies

Read through some of the following sample statements of teaching philosophies, (or extracts from statements). Please note that these examples are not chosen for their excellence, but to show you a range of choices of styles, structures and possible content in teaching philosophy statements.

When you read through the extracts, think about the following questions:

- What do you like/dislike about the statement?
- Who do you think the statement is written for?
- Is the statement written in a personal way?
- Are the teaching methods clear?
- Is there a balance between theory and practice?
- Are examples given?
- What words reveal the writer's teaching values?
- What will you remember most about this statement?

1. College of Business

I see teaching as involving a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students-I believe that teachers have duties to their students and that students have duties to their teachers.

I believe that it is my responsibility as a teacher to provide students with the following:

- an environment conducive to learning,
- knowledge that will help them be successful in achieving their lives' goals,
- materials, opportunities, and feedback that will help them learn, and
- help in becoming and remaining motivated to be successful both in their studies and in applying their knowledge to solve problems in their lives.

I also believe that my students have duties to me, to their fellow students, and to themselves. I believe that these duties support me in fulfilling my duties to students. Thus, I believe that it is the students' responsibility to be supportive of the teacher and fellow students by being:

- tolerant of different points of view,
- prepared for class,
- willing to work hard to complete course activities,
- willing to bring their life experiences into the class to enrich discussions, and

- willing to try to apply what they learn in class to solve the problems they face on their jobs and in their lives.

Therefore, because of the reciprocal nature of the duties between teachers and students, I believe that it is a fundamental mistake to see students as customers or as clients because such a view incorrectly implies that the primary duties in the relationship are the teachers' duties to the students and virtually ignores the duties of students to their teachers, fellow students, and themselves.

Since I teach four different courses that span three different areas of management, I provide a more detailed discussion of how my teaching philosophy relates to what and how I do things in each individual course.

<http://krypton.mankato.msus.edu/~schumann/www/research/tportf2.html>

Your Comments:

2. Education

I am a teacher educator because I want to change the world. While I realize what I hope to accomplish is limited, I know education is where I can have the greatest impact. I want my students to understand that the professional world they will inhabit, the school, is not immutable. As future teachers they can make a difference and their classrooms can be healthy, supportive environments in which their own students can grow and learn.

I wholeheartedly endorse what the Russian educational psychologist L.S.Vygotsky said about learning -- it is a socially constructed. Thus, my students need opportunities to collaborate with each other, as well as with me, to learn and gain expertise about the act of teaching. To be effective teachers, my students must have the opportunity to take responsibility for becoming life-long learners. This means sharing with others what they learn about teaching and realizing all the things that they have not yet discovered. I want my students to become empowered by their own learning and development as teachers. I create situations where students can take charge for what they learn and how it applies in their classrooms. Finally, I want students to realize that they don't teach subjects but rather people. My goal is to teach the whole person, i.e., the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of the human being. The film

classic *The Wizard of Oz* is a wonderful allegory for what I want my students to learn. An effective teacher is like the wizard who must help each individual appreciate the potential that resides within all of us -- the potential to make the best use of our minds, our hearts, and those behaviors that can make the world a better place.

It is impossible for me to be all things to all students. It is healthy for my students to see that I don't have all the answers and that I must deal with contradictions about teaching and life just as they will. To embrace these contradictions and gaps in knowledge creates the opportunity for new understandings and ways of looking at the world. Technology is an important part of my work because as an instructional tool it brings up contradictions for teachers regarding their conceptions of what it means to teach and learn in the Information Aged. Furthermore, the rapidity of change in instructional uses of technology keeps me constantly searching for ways to show teachers what are the educational potentials of culturally transforming developments such as the Internet.

In summary, I believe that as much as possible future teachers should be in control and responsible for what they learn. Furthermore, I believe their accepting responsibility for learning does not occur in a vacuum. It also involves those with whom they work. I develop a sense of community in my classes. As members of that community, students are responsible not only to themselves, but to the other members of the community, including me.

<http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/jabraun/braun/professional/narrat.html#philo>

Your Comments:

3. Engineering

My personal teaching philosophy includes

- Treating all students with absolute equality, regardless of age, gender, nationality, intellectual ability or personal attractiveness.
- Making it clear that I am always available on request, and living up to this by devoting time to personal tuition on demand. This is motivated by the teaching of Jesus Christ, to give to those who ask.

- I make it my business to try to understand the student's point of view however erroneous before attempting to give them my own. This means that when I do teach I can choose a conceptual path that leads from the students current understanding to a broader or more conventional one. The students in my classes know this and ask me for help in their other subjects!
- I try to set a good professional example in written solutions and in conversation, by always referring everything back to the standards of the engineering industry, where a single error could lead to tremendous expense or even loss of life.
- Enthusiasm is critical to good teaching, and students have a sixth sense for it.

http://www.mech.uwa.edu.au/NWS/NWS_Teaching.html

Your Comments:

4. English

Teaching -- both of graduate students and undergraduates -- is a central part of my development as an academic. I've been fortunate enough to have a wide variety of teaching experiences as a graduate student at the University of California, Irvine in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, the Humanities Core Course program, and the Instructional Resources Center. Teaching undergraduates has been gratifying not only in my success in introducing students to a world of critical inquiry, but also in the way in which addressing my students' difficulties with analytical writing and thinking has revitalized and refined my own research and writing. Teaching graduate students pedagogical and professional skills -- things that many universities leave their graduate students to catch as catch can -- has had much of the same sort of reflective benefit: I am now more cognizant of my own teaching skills and the pedagogical tenets behind those skills.

In all of my teaching experience, graduate and undergraduate alike, I've tried to keep two things in mind: first, that although coverage of material is crucial, it's more important to teach students skills than things, and secondly, that students learn skills best through an interactive teaching style that demands their participation and challenges their abilities. Certainly, all students need grounding in their disciplines, and lecture has its place, whether in providing beginning poetry students with a basic vocabulary of rhyme, meter, and form, or in

introducing composition students to the concept of a research paper. But I'm not so interested in whether students know these concepts; rather, I want to see them put them to critical use: I want poetry students to see how Wordsworth's sing-song ballad form could be a deliberate response to Pope's heroic couplets; I want composition students to use their research papers to explore issues that are of importance to them and to their communities.

My teaching philosophy has both traditional and radical roots, and rests, finally, on making myself not so much an expert in my field, but a partner in learning. In the long term, the greatest gift I can give to my students is to make myself obsolete. Moses Maimonides, redacting the Talmud, has claimed that the highest degree of charity is to place a person, through employment or education, in a position where he or she can dispense with other people's aid. This is precisely what I hope to do for my students: I don't so much want to give undergraduate students a reading of a text, as to teach them to read, not just this particular text but any text -- literary, journalistic, legal, visual, or multi-medial. Paulo Friere has called such an approach to teaching a liberation pedagogy, in which professors are no longer the single source of knowledge in the classroom but rather are engaged in helping students move from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge and ideas. I hope to validate students' pre-existing knowledge and abilities, to engage them in a critical look at the world in which they live, and to encourage them to see themselves as actors in the intellectual arena, a world where thoughts and ideas have both potential and consequences.

A pedagogic philosophy such as mine demands that my teaching style be highly interactive, engaging students in a dialogue, and often putting students into dialogue with each other. I strive to structure my teaching around my students' needs, rather than the demands of a particular concept or text. When I develop a syllabus or a lesson plan, for example, I always begin by asking myself what my students should know and be able to do at the end of the class, and then move on to designing the actual class content. If I want them to be able to write an analytical thesis statement, for example, I design exercises that help them determine what constitutes analysis, perhaps by asking them to distinguish between a mere list of attributes and an analysis of those attributes, or by revising a non-analytical thesis statement, or by writing their own analytical thesis statements and submitting them to peer review. If I want them to develop their skills as readers of literature -- say, perhaps, to be able to recognize the conflicting ideologies of nationalism and feminine domesticity that press on Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* -- I present them with a passage where this conflict is at work and ask them as a class to generate a reading, guiding them with questions, suggested links to other passages, references to critical texts.

In my undergraduate classes, I structure my class time around discussion, which frequently centers on a challenging question about a text, one that demands that students both read the text closely and listen closely to each others' questions and arguments. Even in large classes, where lecturing is inevitable, I work

questions into my presentation that are designed to prompt student engagement. I frequently ask students to turn in drafts of their papers, which not only allows me a chance to intervene in their writing, but also prompts them to see critical thinking and writing as a process of engagement and re-engagement with a text, idea, or problem. My students edit each others' papers not only to make them better editors and self-evaluators of their writing, but also to remind them that they, as well as I, can recognize and produce good writing and argumentation. I often assign students to small working groups, in class and out, where they are not only more likely to be more active participants than in a full-class discussion, but are also more likely to engage each other in debate about and refinement of their ideas. I create class listserves or websites, and ask each student to post three weekly entries, one of which answers one of several discussion questions they're given in class, and two postings that respond to two other students' answers. The level of critical exchange that these assignments have generated has convinced me that electronic media play an important role in an interactive pedagogy.

Because I ask my students to risk a good deal -- it's never easy to give a presentation or send an e-mail posting knowing that your classmates and your instructor are watching, listening, or reading carefully -- I also work to make my classroom a safe environment. My electronic media assignments always include a netiquette lesson, and I begin each quarter with an introductory exercise designed not only to combat the anonymity of many college classrooms, but to encourage a sense of camaraderie and supportiveness among students. I've also found, however, that an open exchange between students and teachers and among students themselves can only take place when the instructor provides structure and direction. Students need a clear idea of what's expected of them in the classroom and in their assignments. I always provide students with a detailed policy statement, a day-by-day syllabus, and an outline of class objectives on the board at the beginning of every class. I make every effort to make my assignments clear and concise, to provide examples of responses to the assignment, to inform students of the criteria by which I will grade the assignment, and to teach quick sessions on problems I believe my students might encounter in fulfilling the assignment. I almost always devote some class time to teaching writing concerns such as developing a thesis, structuring an argument, or using quotations effectively; in classes for first-year students, I go so far as to spend a little time discussing some methods for reading and marking a text. In short, I do everything I can to create a dependable structure within which my students can take the risks that are necessary to their intellectual development and independence.

<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~cfaustin/>

Your Comments:

5. Italian Studies and Linguistics

Although there are many things that characterize me as a teacher, my teaching philosophy is based on a fundamentally optimistic view. I believe that all of my students, with the help of the right tools, will be able to overcome any difficulties that the study of a foreign language and literature might present. I don't mean that every student who enters my class will be able to express him or herself equally simply as a result of how I present the lesson, but rather that each of my students will be guaranteed the opportunity to express him or herself to the best of his or her abilities. I believe that one of my best qualities as a teacher is my ability to inspire confidence in my students so that they feel comfortable expressing themselves regardless of their level of ability.

In my language classes, students are required to speak in Italian at all times: this is not always easy for students who are having their first encounter with this method of foreign language instruction. The first step, then, is to put the student at ease in such a way that even the most timid student is able to make the most of his or her time in the classroom. In my teaching evaluations, many students refer to the type of atmosphere that a language class should have, and to how the learning environment in my classroom allowed them to express themselves: "He created such an amazing class environment; no one was ever afraid to ask for help", "Beppe makes learning Italian much less scary", "though I'm not too good at learning language and I abhorred the idea of taking so much of it, he's made the beginning of my torture actually enjoyable", and "we are a family: he makes learning fun plus interesting...I look forward to his class."

Perhaps the secret is this: many students are grateful to be in a class where they feel as though they are part of a family, where relationships are based on respect for one another, and where everybody's ideas are listened to and discussed equally, and finally, where it is possible to express oneself without suspecting an ironic smile behind one's back.

Beyond this are of course the principles that guide every good teacher: organization, accessibility, seriousness, and flexibility.

This last principle is perhaps the most important. While many teachers find it easiest to remain anchored to textbooks, I strive to find innovative ways of teaching that address the diverse needs of all of my students. In addition to my integration of technology into the curriculum, in my classroom I offer a variety of approaches to the study of a foreign language. During the preparation of my newly developed course Current Issues in Language Education Technology for French, German & Italian Language Classroom Instruction, taught at UCLA, I discovered that approximately 40% of students have a visual rather than

mnemonic mode of learning, and I believe that the web activities I have created are a great help to these students.

The use of the Internet allows students to have contact with a truly up-to-date Italian culture. I believe that this also permits my students to create and maintain a productive relationship with contemporary Italy, and that this relationship is based on reality rather than on the stereotypes that unfortunately appear in many textbooks. Many of my students agree on this point: "he made a very good use of technology to incorporate real-life situations/materials from Italy", or " his emphasis on new media keeps the curriculum alive and relevant to today: his class inspires me to pursue the study of Italian language and culture."

When it comes to the instruction of Italian literature and culture, I believe that, in addition to the environment described above, it is of the utmost importance that students express their ideas unreservedly. My courses are characterized by a shared respect of all viewpoints and observations. I do not claim to know the "one and only" interpretation of a literary work and I do not ask my students to regurgitate my own personal ideas. I share a variety of possible interpretations and then, because intellectual growth is founded on a passage from discovery to research and hence on investigation, I ask that my students pull up their sleeves make themselves comfortable and research, discuss and share alternate impressions, ideas and interpretations.

More than twenty-five of my students decided to become majors or minors in Italian. I believe that Italian has become a fundamental part of their lives: above all because they have learned to love the Italian language, culture and literature in an environment they couldn't find in any other class.

<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/italian/grads/cavatort/tphilosophy.html>

Your Comments:

6. Mathematics

I base my teaching on the belief that the only way to learn mathematics is to *do* mathematics. While the process of reading examples and proofs in textbooks and from lecture notes is valuable, the real learning comes through one's own efforts at solving mathematical problems, either computational, theoretical, or both. This is achieved mostly through class assignments, but also through in-class discussions and exercises. I view my role as a facilitator for this process. I must design the framework in which learning can take place, and then stimulate and nurture the students' development, giving help in terms of knowledge, techniques, and encouragement.

My goals in teaching are not just to promote learning of the subject matter. I also try to help the students learn to think logically, learn problem-solving methods and techniques, and improve writing skills (writing clearly and concisely, explaining step-by-step processes, providing valid reasons for logical arguments). In addition, I try to help students see the course material in a holistic context by requiring them to synthesize the various concepts of the course by applying them together.

http://orion.math.iastate.edu/wagner/Teaching_Portfolio.html#philosophy

Your Comments:

7. Entomology

A teacher is a person who creates an environment that is conducive to learning — a place where students can immerse themselves in a subject or discipline as they assimilate a body of requisite information, concepts, and/or skills. Learning is not a passive process, it requires motivation, effort, and persistence. Good students enter the learning environment with a commitment to scholarship, a willingness to work, and a sense of personal responsibility toward achieving their educational goals. Good teachers provide an environment that is challenging yet supportive. They set goals and deadlines. They furnish resources, critique performance, and provide enough stimulation to minimize distractions and sustain motivation. Despite the best intentions and methods, the most effective teacher in the world cannot teach someone who is unwilling to learn. The idea that students must be active participants in the learning process is diametrically

opposed to the currently fashionable view that the student is a 'customer' and the school is merely a vendor of knowledge and degrees.

In my role as a teacher, I have three primary functions: tour guide, facilitator, and gate keeper. These are not mutually exclusive activities, although students often regard them as such. Each lecture, laboratory, or homework assignment contains elements of all three functions.

As a tour guide, I lead my students on an intellectual journey through their course of study. My role is to point out the scenic attractions, highlighting particular features of the subject matter, and focusing attention on major points, important terms or concepts, relevant issues, and significant relationships. It is my responsibility to decide where the path leads, what topics are important, which concepts are central, and how much emphasis is placed on each subject area. It is also my duty to decide how steep the path should be, and whether to lead my students over obstacles or around them.

As a facilitator, my job is to provide an organizational framework and a set of tools that students can use to assimilate the knowledge they seek. These tools must be sufficiently diverse to accommodate the varying needs of different personalities and learning styles. In my courses, I provide lecture outlines, handouts, worksheets, group activities, and homework assignments that supplement lectures and labs. On the Internet, my students can find tutorials, vocabulary lists, self tests, and copies of old exams and quizzes. The variety of these resources is designed to appeal to as many students as possible.

As a gate keeper, I am responsible for setting standards of achievement and for evaluating the progress of my students against those standards. I do not reward laziness or sloppy thinking. I insist upon excellence. I do not grade on a curve, but try to apply an absolute scale. The bar is set at a fixed height, not to be lowered. In the course of their education, I expect students to develop an ability to think critically and analytically, to know what questions to ask before making a decision, and to know where to look for answers to their questions.

<http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/users/j/jrmeyer/www/portfolio.html>

Your Comments:

8. Science

A. My philosophy is based on a proposition that “Teaching is about Learning”. This means that to improve teaching I must focus on the learning needs of the future that will be shaped by today’s students..... Learning is not something that can be defined as a procedure; learning is something that occurs in a rather unstructured and ad-hoc way. However learning can be built into structures and processes. As we make new connections between known concepts, add new strategies, link those new concepts to old concepts, then we begin to learn and our body of knowledge grows. Thus, knowledge is a web of concepts with a whole lot of knowledge between them. (Jambekar, 2000).

B. The primary purpose of U.S. colleges and universities should be teaching, not the preparation of professional athletes. So the question is: How are we to assure that the brightest students select science as a major in college and then as their career? The answer is clear; quality undergraduate education must be made a high priority.... I posit that all teaching opportunities should be founded on the idea of individual inquiry by the student. This principle makes education a learner centred process, not one that is teacher centred. Individual inquiry does not necessarily mean undergraduate research, but it could. The central goal of this pedagogy is to empower students in their education by providing dynamic learning situations and exciting research opportunities. (Wallace, 2000)

Your Comments:

9. Mis

My philosophy of teaching is to provide a classroom environment where students are encouraged to express their own ideas and participate in their education experience. Although I stress individual responsibility for learning in the class, I also provide explanation and guidance regarding the course materials and subject matter. I want my students to enjoy the interaction in my classroom and to be challenged by the intellectual discussion of course material.

The purpose of this document is to illustrate my philosophy of teaching. At the end of each class that I teach, I would like to have my students remember the following about me as an instructor:

- He cared about me as a person and valued my contributions to class discussions.

- He created an environment in the classroom which inspired learning and encouraged individual responsibility for education.

I use these statements as the guide for my performance in the classroom and to define my teaching philosophy. In the remainder of this essay, I provide examples of how I apply these guides in my teaching.

Recognition of Individuality

The diverse backgrounds of my students enable them to bring to my classroom a variety of ideas relating to the class material. I want my students to feel that my classroom is a discussion room where they can share their ideas about the subject matter and contribute to the educational experience. On the first day of class, I ask each student to fill out an individual information sheet. I use this information to learn about my students. Throughout the semester, I attempt to call on each student by name and to know a little about his or her background. When I know my students, they feel valued and enjoy the experience of participating in my class.

Learning Environment

As an instructor, I have the responsibility to help my students learn how to learn. I hope to inspire my students with a desire to learn more on their own. I encourage students to take advantage of resources other than standard course materials and lectures. For example, I assign projects which require interaction with the World Wide Web, electronic mail, and other Internet related resources. By doing so, I hope to show my students the tremendous availability of resources to use in learning about almost any subject matter they are studying.

I expect students to take individual responsibility for their education by coming prepared to participate in class. To encourage student participation, I use active learning techniques to draw individuals into class discussions. During class meetings, I ask students questions and use their responses as a foundation for the concepts to be covered in the class period. In addition, I attempt to redirect questions posed by students in the class to other students. By using active learning techniques, I hope to help my students understand they are responsible for their own education experience.

<http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/J/Jon.L.Jasperson-1/TeachingPhilosophy.html>

Your Comments: