

WRITING A PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

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Abstract

The aim of this research is the importance for the University instructors to know their teaching Philosophy and to write a Philosophy Statement. In order to become a better instructor, there is need to know completely what we are doing with our students, the objectives of our lessons, what do we want them to remember from the experience of the University. After my experience of teaching in Albania, Italy, and in particular in the UAE, I developed my teaching philosophy. The experience in the UAE has been the most important, because I have students from 50 different nationalities. They have different needs and experience. Trying to teach them in a perfect way, considering their needs, is my priority. I hope to help with this paper Albanian Instructors with a better understanding of their way of teaching. This paper will focus in how to write a Philosophy Statement. Before writing it, you have to know which is your Teaching Philosophy. The first question that you may ask to yourself before writing is: What is a teaching Philosophy? Is it the same for all teachers? The answer is no. Your philosophy of teaching statement should reflect your personal values and the needs of your students and your department. At the least, you will want to address four primary questions. To what end? By what means? To what degree? Why? The paper will try to answer these questions by giving examples in a better understanding of the topic. I will add my teaching philosophy and what it's the priority in my classes of mass communication and English language. As a college instructor, my approach to student education has shifted from an emphasis on my teaching, to a more central focus on student learning, and finally to the realization that the two are inseparable aspects of the same whole. I struggle constantly to balance four basic classroom dialectics: theory and application, helping and challenging; maintaining rigor and encouraging creative experimentation; and respecting and supporting a wide diversity of students and student needs while maintaining balance and fairness. Like all values, these are ideals for which I am constantly striving. I have also found that each class provides new challenges and opportunities for my own learning as an instructor and a scholar. As my students change, I change. As my discipline grows and matures, I am constantly struggling to meet the challenge of passing that knowledge on to my students. But ultimately, I also hope to give them the curiosity and skills that will allow them to participate in the genesis of that knowledge.

Keywords: *Teaching Philosophy, Theory and Application, Encouraging the Creativity, Respecting the Diversity of Students.*

In all Universities in the world, before being hired, professors are asked to write their teaching philosophy. In my opinion this should happen in the Universities of Albania as well. In that way the Dean of the faculty will know the priorities of teaching of that professor.

Writing a Philosophy Statement is a difficult task. The principal problem is that the teaching philosophy depends on many factors and all professors should know themselves as instructors before writing their Philosophy Statement. My previous experience of around twelve years in Italy where I completed my studies in English Language and Literature, Journalism, Master in Linguistics and Communication and the PhD in Linguistics, taught me a lot, but most of all the culture was important to me, which is so different from the Albanian culture. Teaching in Italy was different, and I tried my best to understand it and to become a good instructor. When I left Italy for the UAE, I didn't know anything about the culture and the way of teaching in this country. I started to understand it working with my students. In the UAE teaching is student centered. What the students need, you will give. In this country I learned how to write a Philosophy Statement and most important how to know which is my Teaching Philosophy. I have to thank my students that are of different nationalities for making me a better instructor. Living in a multicultural environment enriches everyone and I had a lot from this country.

Before writing a Philosophy Statement you have to know which your Teaching Philosophy is. The first question that you may ask to yourself before writing is: What is a teaching Philosophy? Is it the same for all teachers? The answer is no. Your philosophy of teaching statement should reflect your personal values and the needs of your students and your department. At the least, you will want to address four primary questions, usually in this order.

1. To what end?
2. By what means?
3. To what degree?
4. Why?

1. To What End?

It is important to start by describing where you want to end. In other words, what are your objectives as a teacher? Objectives are important. The rest of your philosophy statement should support these objectives which should be achievable and relevant to your teaching responsibilities.

You would certainly want your students to learn the fundamental content of the courses you teach. But beyond that, do you hope to foster critical thinking, facilitate the acquisition of life-long learning skills, prepare students to function effectively in an information economy, or develop problem-solving strategies? What is your role in orienting students to a discipline, to

what it means to be an educated person in your field? In what specific ways do you want to improve the education of students in your field?

These are questions that will require some thought and you will probably benefit from discussing them with other faculty in your department. Your statement of objectives as an instructor is the most important part of your teaching philosophy. It doesn't matter if you are a math or English Instructor, The teaching Philosophy will not depend on the subject you are teaching.

2. By What Means?

When you have a clear idea about your teaching objectives, you can discuss methods that you use to achieve or work toward those objectives. Here is where you can display your knowledge of learning theory, cognitive development, curriculum design, etc. You will want to explain specific strategies, techniques, exercises, and include both what you have used in the past and are planning for future courses. You will want to tie these directly to your teaching objectives and discuss how each approach is designed for that purpose.

Discuss how you make decisions about content, resources, and methods. If you include a field trip, what are your learning objectives? I may suggest here to use the field trips as a possibility to learn. In teaching Mass Communication, I have visited with my students different Media Institutions, like MBC, CNN, where they have learnt a lot discussing with people who work there. If you assemble a collection of readings, how did you decide what to include? I may suggest here if you are an English instructor at the University, to use novels or short stories that are not in the program for the objective you want to focus on more. How do you decide whether to use group or individual projects? I may suggest here to use both ways. It is important for students to work individually, but it's also important to give them group projects, so they can learn how to work in group. Do you use active learning or student-centered learning principles and why? In this case, I would suggest student-centered learning for the reason that students at the University will learn a subject when it is interesting to them. Relate these decisions and methods to the kinds of classes you teach (large lecture, small discussion, lab, etc.) and make connections to your course objectives.

3. To What Degree?

You will need to discuss how you intend to measure your effectiveness vis a vis the objectives and methods you have outlined. Because your objectives are most likely related to student learning, then you will probably use measures of student outcomes to reflect your efforts. Student evaluations are always a touchy subject among teachers but in large part that is because teachers have not devised their own assessment methods. Most of us are obligated to use

standardized evaluation forms. But that does not prevent us from developing other means that are more directly related to our specific goals and objectives. Teachers who develop their own evaluations usually get more relevant feedback. But in addition, they usually get more positive feedback as well because they are asking the students to reflect on the most important aspects of the course.

If one of your objectives is to develop problem-solving skills, then you will probably want to test your students' ability to solve problems. In that case, discuss how you construct problems for them to solve, what skills those problems are meant to evaluate, and the level of performance that you are seeking.

4. Why?

Here is where you can be. What, to you, are the great and wonderful rewards of teaching? Why is teaching important? How do you want to make the world or at least higher education better? When you are overworked and feel undervalued, to what ideals do you return in order to rejuvenate yourself and inspire your students? How do you want to make a difference in the lives of your students? Teaching is a beautiful job that gives a lot of satisfaction. If you make it with love, students will appreciate your work and this is the best reward.

After answering these questions, then you will be ready to write your own Teaching philosophy that will be different from other instructors. In my opinion, this statement philosophy may change with the experience that an instructor will have. Below you will find my teaching philosophy as an instructor of foreign languages and mass communication courses.

My Teaching Philosophy¹:

As a college instructor, my approach to student education has shifted from an emphasis on my teaching, to a more central focus on student learning, and finally to the realization that the two are inseparable aspects of the same whole. I struggle constantly to balance four basic classroom dialectics: theory and application, helping and challenging; maintaining rigor and encouraging creative experimentation; and respecting and supporting a wide diversity of students and student needs while maintaining balance and fairness.

Theory and Application: I believe that learning requires deep understanding that can only come when students internalize and actively apply knowledge in creative and meaningful ways. In any class I teach, I hope that students will be able to wrestle with the course material in their own lives, applying to what they experience in their everyday world. Ideally, this approach should empower students to articulate ideas and process concepts in ways that are meaningful to them.

Helping and Challenging: I also understand that part of a student's everyday world is the university itself. Thus, my role as a teacher includes helping students succeed in the unique culture of higher education. While I want students to be able to personalize their education via active learning, I also recognize that I have expertise from which students may benefit. I believe most students will rise to the challenge when quality work is demanded of them if they are also helped to develop the skills necessary to make that possible. For this reason I encourage critical thinking and the improvement of oral and written skills in all of my classes.

Maintaining Rigor and Encouraging Creative Experimentation: I believe students are best served when they are actively and rigorously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. A teacher may inspire, but students should be actively engaged in the learning process for it to be successful. In an effort to give students greater ownership of the knowledge they encounter, I use cooperative and active learning strategies as well as lecture in my classroom and try to develop assignments that foster both analytical and critical thinking and opportunities for creative application.

Respecting and Supporting a Wide Diversity of Students and Student Needs While Maintaining Balance and Fairness: The study of communication is practical; it is practiced and applied by our students and ourselves on a daily basis. As a result, we teach by what we do in the classroom as much as by what we say. By modeling good communication, concern and compassion for our students, and a real enthusiasm for our subject matter we also teach the value of our subject. As an interculturalist, I strongly value the diversity of learning styles and the unique perspectives - both individual and cultural - that my students may bring to the classroom. As a result, I strive to provide an environment where students feel comfortable in expressing their needs and opinions and believe that the entire class benefits and learns from that process.

Like all values, these are ideals for which I am constantly striving. I have also found that each class provides new challenges and opportunities for my own learning as an instructor and a scholar. As my students change, I change. As my discipline grows and matures, I am constantly struggling to meet the challenge of passing that knowledge on to my students. But ultimately, I also hope to give them the curiosity and skills that will allow them to participate in the genesis of that knowledge.

ⁱ This is the Teaching Philosophy that I try to apply in my courses. It is the result of the experience of teaching in three different countries: Albania, Italy, and UAE.