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Teaching Philosophy Statements – What You Should Know

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Junior Faculty, Graduate Students, Post-Doctoral Fellows and departmental hiring committees all need to be familiar with the teaching philosophy statement and its potential uses in higher education.

Why should you know about teaching philosophy statements?

Teaching philosophy statements are not typically required for applications for faculty positions here at Brown, but they are increasingly being asked for at a wide range of academic institutions across the country, ranging from research-intensive universities and Ivy League Schools to liberal arts colleges and community colleges. As a graduate student or postdoc applying for a faculty position, you may well be asked to submit a teaching philosophy statement as part of your application. Some applications call for “evidence of teaching excellence” and in this case you can send a teaching philosophy statement along with student evaluations or statements by faculty supervisors. Even if you are not asked to submit a teaching philosophy statement, there is ample evidence that writing one helps prepare you to talk more articulately about your teaching. As a faculty member mentoring graduate students

and possibly postdocs, you may be asked by them about strategies for succeeding on the academic job market or even about teaching philosophy statements themselves. Learning about teaching philosophy statements can help you better advise mentees on how to put their best foot forward professionally.

What is a teaching philosophy statement?

A teaching philosophy statement should contain the answer to three fundamental questions:

1. How do you teach?
2. Why do you teach the way you do?
3. How do you know that you are being effective and that your students are learning?

The statement, which should be no longer than 1-2 single-spaced pages, outlines one's pedagogical strategies and the pedagogical beliefs that underlie them, and also includes evidence of pedagogical effectiveness. It may also contain reflections on areas for improvement or future growth, phrased positively so as not to undermine the portrayal of one's effectiveness. Well-written teaching philosophy statements include specific examples that make one's teaching practice come alive for readers and make the statement memorable. Teaching philosophy statements can be stand-alone documents or can serve as the framing piece in a teaching portfolio.¹

The fact that many graduate students and postdocs have only limited teaching experience, combined with the awkward fact that they are writing for an audience more experienced than they are, can make these statements challenging to write. However, all graduate students and postdocs have extensive experience as learners, and we encourage them to use this experience to come up with examples of pedagogical strategies they would adapt in their own teaching and to explore the underlying reasons for this, and to incorporate these into their statements, utilizing phrases such as "I would" rather than "I do."

How does a teaching philosophy differ from other kinds of teaching statements?

Many advertisements for faculty positions call for a statement of teaching interests or simply a teaching statement. While a statement of teaching interests clearly should describe the kinds of courses one is prepared to teach now or one is interested in developing eventually, the expectations for a teaching statement are less obvious. In some cases, institutions may want applicants to submit a teaching philosophy statement while in others applicants are expected to describe their teaching competencies and teaching experience, as well as their teaching effectiveness, and perhaps also discuss their pedagogical beliefs and strategies, though not in great detail. If one is unwilling to inquire about precise expectations, then submitting a statement that meets the latter set of expectations is probably the safest bet.

How can I learn more about teaching philosophy statements?

- Explore the resources posted on the Center's website under Consulting Services/ Preparation for the Academic Job Market/ Online Resources at:
- www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/consulting/jobmarket.html#philos.
- Graduate students and postdocs are welcome to attend any sessions of the Academic Job Search Series, co-sponsored by the Sheridan Center and the Career Development Center. Each fall, the Sheridan Center runs a session specifically on teaching philosophy statements. For more information, see the Sheridan Center's website: www.brown.edu/sheridan_center.
- Come to the Center's Resource Library and browse the teaching philosophy statements included in the collection of teaching portfolios compiled by Brown graduate students, many of whom compiled these materials when participating in the Center's Professional Development Seminar: Certificate III Program (for more information about this program, see www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/certificateprograms/pds.html).
- Schedule an individual consultation with one of the Associate Directors to review your statement. If you are in the humanities or social sciences,

contact Laura Hess (Sheridan_humss@brown.edu). If you are in the life or physical sciences, contact Kathy Takayama (Sheridan_sci@brown.edu).

¹ For more information about teaching portfolios, see the Sheridan Center handbook *The Teaching Portfolio*, available online at http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/publications/handbooks/teach_port.pdf or in hard copy at the Center.