TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS

ONLINE RESOURCES: http://brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning/documenting-teaching-effectiveness/teaching-philosophy-statements

SAMPLE STATEMENTS: The Sheridan Center’s Resource Library has a collection of teaching philosophy statements in teaching portfolios compiled by Brown graduate students. You are welcome to come by the Center to use the library during normal business hours.

TODAY’S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION: http://brown.edu/sheridan/events-workshops/past-events/academic-job-search

SAMPLE STATEMENTS

Essay Narrative Format – Science Education (http://ucat.osu.edu/selected_links/teaching_portfolio/philosophy/maurer.htm)

Learning is, of course, the main purpose of education. It is the goal of every student and the task of every teacher to increase knowledge and understanding in the classroom. I feel that the concept of learning should be focused around four main areas. Independent thought is essential to the development of each student. Being able to form unique independent ideas to solve problems will serve them both in and outside of the classroom. Group interaction is also an important part of learning. Being able to share ideas, validate them with the thoughts of others, and teamwork are important processes in social and mental development. The teacher should also be prepared to lead students in the direction they should go to reach correct conclusions and answers, without always providing the answers themselves. Finally, stressing the use of learned ideas and processes in new situations is essential. By using information, students should be able to apply what they have learned to new life or learning situations. Transfer of this sort is what really determines what has been learned.

In order to aid students in reaching their desired learning goals, the teacher must have a clear set of objectives. I feel that teachers should serve a number of purposes. First and foremost, they should act as guides, pointing students in the direction they should go to find answers and solve problems by providing them with the essential information they need to do so. They should also act as advisors or facilitators, especially in the university setting. Students at this level need input and more assistance in deciding on courses to best reach their personal academic and career goals. Instructors should help these students in making important decisions in these areas. Students also need to feel comfortable approaching their instructor for discussion outside of class. By instructors acting as mentors and friends to students, the students can begin to make professional contacts, find professors to aid in career plans and use for recommendations, and have an academic source to call upon when stresses of classes begin to be overwhelming. Instructors need to make education as enjoyable and beneficial as possible to for students. By teachers acting in all of these manners, a student's education will be more complete and enjoyable than one in which a student only sees the teacher in the classroom.

Teachers should also set specific goals for students. Mastery of information has always been the goal for teachers, and should continue to be one of the essentials. In addition, long term goals for students should be set, allowing students to work towards goals over time. As a part of this, intellectual development of each student should continue over time, allowing students to use what they are learning later in life. It is also the hope of all teachers that students will develop an interest in the subject area being taught. Although this does not occur in all cases, students should at the very least develop an appreciation for the subject and the material being taught in the classroom.

This leads to an expected question: how does one implement this philosophy? No single teacher will be able to implement all of their personal educational philosophies at one time. By constantly creating ideas for day-to-day use, the teacher can begin to work towards their philosophical goals. Over time, these can become long-term goals, allowing the teacher to develop the teaching styles and methods that work best for them. Finally, by continually asking, "How do I conduct my classes?" the teacher can examine how close or far they are from sticking to their educational goals.

As with anyone involved in education, student or teacher, a personal growth plan should always be included. One never develop socially, intellectually, or academically, without consistently learning new things and striving to further oneself. This can include classes as a part of a continuing education program, receiving regular input from students and consistently attempting to improve their teaching style, or trying new ideas or strategies on regular basis.

Each teacher needs to have a personal philosophy of teaching to guide their actions and ideas. This list is one I have made to guide myself. It is by no means all-encompassing, but it provides a basis for what I feel about education, and what I want my students to feel when they leave my classroom.
Q & A Format – Consumer & Textile Science  (http://ucat.osu.edu/selected_links/teaching_portfolio/philosophy/Hannel_Cons&TextileSci.html)

How do I think learning occurs?

I believe that students learn when they are exposed to different ways of understanding the material. Reading, elaboration through lectures and the presentation of diverse visual media, and discussions of the material, in addition to projects that require putting it all together, give every type of learner several ways to "get it." I think most students gain little from the testing process. They learn better and have a greater sense of accomplishment through the completion of complex projects that consolidate large areas of the material being covered.

I also believe that it is crucial to promote other kinds of learning than that related to the course material. Students should learn critical thinking through questions posed and discussed in class. The structure of projects should lead to improvement of social skills. Projects that require classroom presentations can improve speaking skills and professionalism. Those done by groups of students can teach them how to get the best work from each member and the fine art of diplomacy.

How can I facilitate this process? How have I come to these conclusions?

I am very much a person who learns by doing and I believe that many people interested in clothing, interiors, and textiles are similar. We have a very practical, technical approach to the subject area. For this reason I really emphasize projects that incorporate large portions of the coursework.

What goals do I have for my students?

I want my students to leave my classes more "awake" than when they came in. This does not mean that I see myself in their daily cup of java! My students tend to be those who are interested in clothing and interior design and retail merchandising and they frequently have an idealized and simplistic view of what it means to work in those fields. I want them to question the ethics of the fashion industry: its labor practices, its wanton disregard for the diversity of the human form, and its promotion of consumerism. I want them to notice when magazine advertisements use the principles of design to manipulate consumers and promulgate negative and debilitating stereotypes. This does not mean that I want them to go out there and dismantle the fashion industry. I want them to understand that we can change it and make it a better service to people. We can use design principles to enhance clothing for more kinds of bodies and to create better advertising.

I also want them to understand the necessity for basic skills. Fashion design students must be able to understand the physical construction of a garment and be able to communicate that design through simple illustrations. There is no getting around the necessity for sewing knowledge. Recognizing textile weaves like twill and fiber types like cotton are foundation to a job in clothing or interiors. These basics will give them the skills and the vocabulary necessary for this work.

I want them to have a sense of history. If "there is no new thing under the sun," then it is it doubly so in the fashion world. They must make the connections between today and the past in order to correctly interpret the trends.

What do I do to implement my plans/intentions?

I have a lot of enthusiasm for clothing, interiors, and textiles. Each can be a work of art, an object of daily, mundane use, and each can be both at the same time. I want my students to realize the extent to which textiles and clothing are a part of our lives. I want them to feel my enthusiasm and my commitment and to carry that forward in their own work. I try to create enthusiasm by using lots of visual media, especially slides from advertisements they may be familiar with in current magazines. With these tools I can ask them to critically analyze the aesthetic content, as well as the meanings associated with the image. I also show slides of historic dress whenever I can to illustrate connections between images and fashions of today with those in the past.

I make their thoughts and opinions a big part of the class, with special emphasis on having the students think about why they feel a specific way and clearly articulating their explanations.

What goals have I set for myself as a teacher?

My first teaching assignment was a flat pattern design class for fashion students. I thought all design students had started a the beginning as I had-wih sewing. But many of them could not even thread a needle! They also had very little knowledge of textile or garment structure. I realized that I had to teach the basics at the same time I taught complicated methods of creating patterns for the construction of clothing. I was very hard on that first group of students! Since then I have developed a more generous philosophy with my students.

My goals are to continue to have empathy for my students and the difficulties many of them encounter in their work to be educated.

To continue to find new ways to connect with my students and get them interested in the more complex questions associated with clothing and textiles.
Creative Format – Anthropology  
My teaching philosophy is based around these concepts.  

**Passion:** I believe that a teacher is someone who is passionate about a topic and equally passionate about communicating that topic to others.  

**Communication:** Effective teaching not only involves being passionate about a subject, but being able to convey it to students in such a way that they will understand it, but additionally, be able to then think about the subject and apply it in some way to their lives.  

**Fairness:** I believe in being fair as a teacher, which to me means being able to understand what students are going through as individuals and as students. It means treating students with an impartial attitude, but not an uncaring attitude.  

**Learning:** All too often, students come into a classroom and simply respond by rote or memory to what the instructor is teaching. True learning involves active thinking. I believe the best classrooms are those where both the teacher and the students learn from each other.  

**Challenging:** Teaching should challenge both the teacher and the student. Teachers should be challenged to try to deliver course materials in different ways and from different perspectives. Students should be challenged by the teacher and the course materials.  

**Fun:** I believe that learning should be fun. This does not mean necessarily frivolous, but fun. It seems a tried and true method of learning that is sometimes forgotten: the best learning often occurs during ‘play’ or play-like situations. If a teacher can ascribe a sense of fun in the classroom, I believe that the benefits are great.  

**Humor:** Every successful teacher must have humor. Stand-up comedy is not necessary, but laughter goes a long way in showing the students that the teacher is just a person, like themselves.  

**Caring:** A teacher must care for the students, first and foremost. For the subject, and for the entire learning process.  

**Individuality:** Teachers should recognize individuality in their students. Every student has a life, a story, thoughts, and feelings that they bring with them to the classroom and the learning process.  

**Questioning:** All too often, students regard instructors and the material they present as the final authority on any and all lecture material and information. I believe that students should be encouraged to question course material, to turn it over in their minds and question its validity. Science is all about questioning, and no progress was ever made without it.  

**Flexibility:** When I construct a course syllabus, I have an excellent idea of how the course will proceed. However, I always leave room to adapt to student interests and concerns. Class discussions are sometimes difficult enough to engender without squashing them because of adherence to a schedule.  

**Applied learning:** Throughout much of my undergraduate career, the courses I learned the most from and remember to this day were the courses that enabled me to take concepts and apply them to something concrete. I have always attempted to utilize this in my own teaching, arranging as many ‘hands on’ experiences for my students as possible.  

**Real world:** Occasionally I hear from students that they find it difficult to attach concepts to their own lives. I try, in my teaching, to give students a ‘take home’ message in what they learn. I bring in current events, local, national and international, whenever possible so that students may link what they learn in class with the world around them.  

**SAMPLE STATEMENT FROM BIOLOGY**  
One of my major goals as a science educator is to demonstrate the relevance of biology to students. Since biology is the study of life itself, it is easy to demonstrate the significance of biological concepts, but I try to customize each class by giving examples based on the specific interests of students. Since students’ interests vary, especially in a non-majors course, I begin each course by asking students what they would like to learn about. Throughout the semester I integrate those topics that are most requested by the students, and also include examples from my own research. For example, in an introductory biology course, several students wanted to learn more about human diseases, a very popular topic. Throughout the course, I talked about several different diseases, integrating them into a variety of course topics including molecular cloning, genetics, and human reproduction. I believe that by piquing students’ curiosity in the classroom, they will be motivated to learn more about biology on their own.  

I believe that my role in the classroom is to provide a framework of knowledge upon which students can build, and to describe some examples of relevant applications. In order to help students begin to think like a scientist, I encourage them to form hypotheses and discover knowledge on their own. One way that I achieve this is through the use of case studies. After presenting students with some basic information about a subject, they meet in small groups to work through a real life scenario. Students must analyze information and apply their knowledge to solve a pertinent problem. To add interest to the topic of molecular cloning, for example, I created a case involving the creation of recombinant protein vaccines for the prevention of a disease affecting our soldiers in Iraq. Students learned about the principles of antibodies and vaccines and were introduced to an important pathogen, in addition to a relevant application of recombinant cloning. Student feedback has been very positive regarding the case studies, and my students look forward to them as a welcome break from the traditional lecture format and for the opportunity to discuss concepts in a group environment.  

While the main focus of my teaching will always be to educate the students, I also hope to continue my own education through my teaching experiences. By creating an atmosphere of trust and honesty in the classroom, I hope that students will be open to share with me how they feel the class could be improved. I strive to improve my courses by conducting mid-semester evaluations. In addition to providing me with valuable feedback, this also gives students a chance to be heard and makes them feel more invested in the course. By considering students’ interests, listening to their feedback and presenting them with relevant applications of biological principles, I create for my students a unique and customized learning experience that leaves them with a greater appreciation for the fascinating world of biology.
A couple years ago, while I was an instructor in an introductory-level American Culture course, I had an experience that taught me how to measure my success as a teacher. That term, the college newspaper reported on a race-based hate crime that had taken place in an undergraduate neighborhood. Campus organizations responded with a full day of programming, and I offered extra credit to students who attended and then wrote a response paper, presented to the class, or met with me in office hours to discuss their experience. In one such meeting, a white student, who had grown up in a mostly-white suburb of Chicago, claimed to have been unaffected by racism. When I related what he said to the course lectures for that week and pointed out to him that his community was racially homogeneous because of racism and “white flight,” I watched a change happen in him. “Why didn’t I know about this before,” he asked me, “What is anyone doing about it?”

That interaction represented a convergence of all the elements of my philosophy on teaching and learning. Relating course material to current events and students’ experiences allowed that student to apply what we were learning to better understand both the material and his own experience. Encouraging students to seek learning opportunities outside of class was a way to get them to take ownership of their education. Providing various kinds of opportunities for students to process what they had learned at the campus event represented my sensitivity to diverse skill sets and learning styles. And the office hours meeting demonstrated what is at the heart of my teaching philosophy: a focus on nurturing individual relationships and building communities within and outside the classroom.

One of my primary teaching goals is to help students be critical of the world around them in ways that make them want to enact change. To that end, I offer in my courses opportunities for students to learn about current happenings and analyze them using histories and theories they have learned in class. In the introductory-level American Culture course, our examination of the hate crime incident began when I saw the front-page headline in that day’s college newspaper. Immediately, I went to the newspaper office, asked for 50 copies, and designed within the hour a discussion about race, racism, xenophobia, and media reportage for class the same day.

In an upper-level Ethnic Studies course I taught on beauty pageantry this past Spring Term, I posted a real-time feed of pageant news to our course homepage and then asked one student volunteer each day to prepare an article that they would summarize at the beginning of the next day’s class. As a scholar of popular culture, my work requires that I look into the everyday for objects of study that, when read closely, teach us lessons about ourselves. My aim is for students to learn that same skill, and so I make sure to be knowledgeable about current events and flexible about lesson plans, to help students use the vocabulary of the course to talk about what they are experiencing. I am often able to assess that learning when student comments in class or in office hours tie together analytically course materials with past or present events in their lives.

One second goal of my teaching practice is to encourage students to take ownership of their education. In my upper-level beauty pageants course, I began that effort by not including a grading scale on my syllabus. Instead, on the first day of class, I talked to students about how judging systems in pageants outline categories of evaluation and measures used to evaluate contestants, and that both of those things represented the values inherent to the pageant itself. Likewise, I told them, we as a classroom community would brainstorm categories of evaluation in the course—like participation, reading assignments, writing assignments—and then develop a system to measure student performance that reflected my values as a teacher and their values as a class. Students took on the activity with enthusiasm and produced models of an “A” student, a “B” student, and so on that I took away and revised into a grading rubric in which students could feel invested because they had helped to create it.

In both upper- and lower-level courses, one of my most successful ways of teaching students to take charge of their learning and others’ is an assignment I call co-facilitation, wherein I empower students to teach one another. Halfway through the term, after I have spent weeks modeling various kinds of lectures, discussions, and in-class activities, I give students the opportunity to volunteer to facilitate a class session or portion thereof with me. In a co-facilitation assignment, a pair of students completes assigned readings for the week early, so that they can meet with me in office hours the day before a class and develop a lesson plan. Once we get to class, the cofacilitators execute the lesson plan, sometimes so skillfully that I am able to act as just another student in the class. The co-facilitation assignment draws upon various learning skills. Students work in groups to process a reading assignment, distill the most important points from it, and determine how best to present it so that their peers can learn. As a result, co-facilitation comes with a sort of built-in system of assessment: I can tell how well student facilitators have learned the material by how clearly they teach it. In course evaluations, students who cofacilitated consistently say they learned the most from that opportunity to teach, and students who did not take advantage of that opportunity consistently lament the fact that I offered co-facilitation on a volunteer basis. They wish I had made everyone do it.

My third major teaching goal is to be sensitive to diverse skill sets and learning styles. One of the reasons I began the co-facilitation assignment is that I learned, from seminars about pedagogy, that instructors often teach to their own learning styles. Recognizing the limits of my learning style as an individual, I created co-facilitation as a way to get a number of different people with diverse backgrounds all teaching to their own learning styles. I also solicit periodic feedback from students about their teaching and learning. I often give students between two and five minutes before a discussion begins to write their comments and then use the feedback to improve my own teaching.

In addition to written assignments, participation is always a key element of my teaching in both upper- and lower-level courses. Course evaluations have shown time and again that students appreciate that full-group discussions and small-group activities in my classes are lively, engaged, honest, and safe—as students feel comfortable expressing dissent without being disrespectful or feeling disrespected. In college, I was an active classroom participant, and so I have had to learn in conversation with more reticent students what the barriers are to their vocal participation in class. To be sensitive to barriers of shyness, inexperience, intimidation, and trouble articulating thoughts into words on the spot, I offer a number of ways for students to participate: as presenters of current events material prepared in advance, as discussants in class, as facilitators of class sessions, and as respondents to questions posed to the class email listserve. In addition, I use writing as a discussion tool, often giving students between two and five minutes before a discussion begins to write a response to a discussion question, so that they can base their spoken comments to the rest of the class on something they have already articulated in writing.

Most importantly, students who enter my classes know from the first day that office hours are an important learning and participation opportunity. For me, office hours fulfill, in some way, all of my teaching goals. Most directly, though, office hours appointments allow me to build a classroom community out of a number of individual relationships. I require that all students meet with me at least once at the beginning of the term, and I require further that any student who misses a class come into my office to discuss with me the readings relevant to the day of their absence. Office hours conversations give me an opportunity to assess how well an individual student is learning through one-on-one interaction. Those interactions also have positive ramifications in the classroom, as I consistently receive evaluations saying that students feel respected in the classroom, are comfortable speaking their minds, and know I am there as an ally. By forming relationships, I form community; and by forming community, I form engaged students who continue to be learners even after they leave the classroom. At the most successful of those moments, students ask not only what anyone is doing to change things but, more importantly, how they themselves can be the ones to enact that change.