Teaching and Learning Working Group (TLWG)
Department of History, UC Berkeley

"WRITING A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY"

What is the purpose of a teaching statement?

- A teaching statement is a brief overview of your approach to teaching and learning supported by specific examples from your teaching experience
- It may be the only way for the job search committee to evaluate the teaching ability of a job candidate (if no teaching demonstration is required as part of the application process, for instance)
- *(Note: A teaching portfolio is an annotated collection of "evidence" to support your teaching statement. It can include, for instance, student evaluations, classroom materials, syllabi, teaching-specific letters of recommendation, etc. You can think of a teaching statement, then, as a "thesis statement" or "abstract" of a larger teaching portfolio – whether or not you have formally compiled a portfolio. Most of us have the materials necessary to put a teaching portfolio together. For more information on this, see notes on Mark Brilliant's presentation this past February, located on the TLWG bSpace site).*

What is the basic structure of a teaching statement?

- 1-2 pages; on the shorter side for a research institution, and on the longer side for a teaching institution; or the page-limit set in the job announcement (generally speaking, following the application instructions is important)
- It is best when written as a narrative and in the first person; no jargon necessary
- Basic sections of a teaching statement:
  - ✓ Your learning objectives for students
  - ✓ Your teaching methods for reaching those learning objectives
  - ✓ Methods you use to assess student learning/measuring teaching effectiveness
- Make sure your teaching statement is well-written. Proofread it!

What type of "nuts and bolts" information should my teaching statement include?

- ***Your learning objectives for your students.*** Is it to acquire new knowledge? To develop specific skills, like how to read critically, or write a solid historical argument with evidence to support? Whether it's one or the other, or both, make sure your statement adequately describes the objectives you set/have set for students in your teaching experience.

- ***Differences in types of courses taught.*** If your teaching experience ranges from being a GSI for a survey course, teaching a seminar-style class such as a

103 or an R1B, or lecturing at a community college, then your teaching statement should delineate the differences in your objectives and approaches in each of these teaching situations. Note: The point here is not to simply *list* the courses you've taught (i.e., reprint your CV into the statement), but *to make distinctions in your teaching approaches* to each, if applicable.

- ***Your teaching methods for reaching your learning objectives.*** What types of assignments do you design to reach your learning objectives? Do you rely heavily on in-class activities, such as group work, presentations, or debate? What reading strategies do you teach students? Do you prefer preparatory assignments that build upon one another to help students with a larger one (scaffolding)? What methods do you use to help students understand difficult historical concepts? What determines your choice to use one strategy over another? Choose the methods and strategies that best illustrate your teaching philosophy.

- ***Provide specific examples to help make your philosophy concrete.*** These can be stories about how a particular technique you used helped a student arrive at an "aha!" moment, or how you sought to address a common bottleneck issue in the classroom that prevented students from reaching the objectives you set in the course. Breakthroughs you have in teaching are the types of examples/stories job search committees want to hear about. Even "failures" that pushed you to revise or develop a lesson that ultimately did work is worth mentioning (though do make sure to put a positive spin on it in the telling). The key is to *show* (and not just *tell*, with generic statements) how you teach and what the outcomes were for student learning.

- ***How do you assess student learning/measure your teaching effectiveness?*** This point can be easily tied to your discussion of teaching methods and learning objectives. How do you figure out whether or not your teaching methods and strategies worked? How do you measure the degree to which students have met your learning objectives? How does your grading policy help you assess student learning/teaching effectiveness?

- ***Discuss your pedagogical development.*** Doing so will show that you are reflective about your teaching (this is especially important for teaching institutions). This process can take place formally and informally. Maybe you frequently read the Scholarship of Teaching literature to inform your pedagogy and philosophy. You should reference this. Perhaps you regularly survey your students to get feedback to improve your methods. Or maybe you've adopted and modified best teaching practices you've observed from fellow graduate students or faculty. These are all valid forms of reflection, and convey a seriousness of purpose about teaching to the job search committee.

- ***Connect your teaching philosophy to the practice of studying of history.*** More than likely, your learning objectives inherently include skills necessary and unique to studying history – how to critically read a primary source, how to place an event in its historical context, determining biases in the sources and what that tells us about a given society, or constructing a coherent narrative out of several pieces of evidence. Explicitly saying this can help give depth and specificity to your statement.

- ***Integrate your research and teaching.*** While the focus of a teaching statement is, of course, *teaching*, it couldn't hurt to show how your research has shaped the content you've included in courses, or has provided an opportunity to teach students important skills they might not have otherwise learned. How are the methods unique (or new) to your specific area of research applicable to the learning objectives in your course? Are there quantitative analysis skills central to your research that you've passed on to your students? Does your research help students understand an old interpretation in a new way? (How much you want to do this in your statement may depend on the institution to which you are applying – it might be best to seek adviser/faculty advice on this).

How can I begin to think about my teaching philosophy?

- ***Analyze your course syllabus(i).*** Your syllabus represents your teaching philosophy in many ways. The grading policy, for instance, tells the student what you value (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in terms of course objectives and outcomes. The style and tone in which you write the course description, requirements, and expectations reveal something about your interaction with students, what you view your role as the teacher to be, and how you would like students to participate in the course. Read your own syllabus closely and think about the ideas and goals that shaped its contours, and then try to translate those into a teaching statement.

- ***Begin with some free-thinking and -writing.*** Thinking about the following questions and writing about them in a first draft can help you articulate your teaching philosophy (this may be especially helpful if you do not have a syllabus to analyze, as suggested in the above step):
  - ✓ What do you enjoy about teaching history? Studying history?
  - ✓ Why is historical thinking a valuable skill for students to have?
  - ✓ What do I believe or value about teaching and student learning? How has this shaped how I develop lessons/teach?
  - ✓ How does my research/field influence my approach to teaching?
  - ✓ How does your identity/background and your students' identities/backgrounds affect teaching and learning in your classes?
  - ✓ What do I expect the outcomes of my teaching to be?
  - ✓ What do I still struggle with in terms of teaching and student learning?

- ✓ How do I know if I've taught successfully?

What else should I think about in writing my teaching statement? (It might be easiest to address these points after you've written a statement you feel good about).

- ***Research the institutions to which you are applying.*** Beyond distinguishing between a research institution or a teaching institution, it's important to understand the expectations and values particular to an institution. Are you applying to a liberal arts college? Community college? State university? A religious institution? What are the student demographics? Is the student population highly diverse? In what ways? How big is the university? Once you have a sense of the institution, it's important to acknowledge this in your teaching statement by demonstrating how you would be a good "fit" in the department and for their students. Bottom line: Know the audience for whom you are writing.

- ***Be humble, but confident.*** No one on the job search committee will expect you to have all the answers. Committee members, often with many more years experience teaching than you, will understand that teaching is as much an enterprise in learning for the instructor as it is for the student. Carefully craft your statements to highlight your strengths and the teaching achievements due to you, but also acknowledge you have room to grow.

- ***Close with a strong conclusion.*** What is the take-away message you want the job search committee to leave with after reading your teaching statement? What about your teaching philosophy would you like to linger in their minds as they continue to sift through hundreds of applications? Try to encapsulate your teaching philosophy in just a few sentences that succinctly highlight your teaching beliefs, methods, and strengths, as well as what your particular teaching expertise can offer to the success of the department and their student body.

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Works Referenced:

The Center for Effective Teaching and Learning at University of Texas, El Paso
http://cetalweb.utep.edu/sun/cetal/resources/portfolios/writetps.htm

Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Center.
"Writing a Winning Teaching Statement."
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Montell, Gabriela. "How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy." *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* March 27, 2003.

O'Neal, Chris, Deborah Meizlish, and Matthew Kaplan. "Writing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy for the Academic Job Search." CRLT Occasional Paper No. 23, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan (2007).

The Professor Is In. "The Dreaded Teaching Statement: Eight Pitfalls." September 16, 2011. http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/09/16/thedreadedteachingstatement/

The Teaching Center, Washington University in St. Louis
http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/About/ProgramsforGraduateStudentsandPostdocs/resources/Pages/Writing-a-Teaching-Philosophy-Statement.aspx