

Developing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy, by Dr. Mark D. Evans

Teaching is a scholarly activity when it is: purposeful, reflective, documented, evaluated, and shared. There is no better way to begin framing your scholarship of teaching than to write a personal statement of your own teaching philosophy. The teaching philosophy statement helps one to develop the framework of the teacher that he or she wants to be. The written statement helps the teacher to remain focused in a hectic, changing environment. It helps to develop a dialog between teachers and leaders regarding one's teaching initiatives and activities. A written teaching philosophy, if shared, will help cadets understand the teacher's methods and attitudes and will help cadets to see their role as learners. Finally, a teaching philosophy statement can help teachers to grow as professional educators.

If your leadership is asking you to write a teaching philosophy statement, whether they want you to share it with them or not, they are communicating that "teaching is important in this organization" and that "your growth as a teacher is important to me". What a great opportunity to start a conversation about teaching with department leaders or with a teaching mentor not in your rating chain. Make it a meaningful conversation not filled with platitudes, but really getting into the details of you, your classroom activities, your goals as a teacher, and your interaction with cadets. The teaching philosophy statement will help you to organize these thoughts, document them for your continued reference, and provide a forum for sharing and discussion.

A 1-2 page, living document that describes YOU in the classroom, your behaviors and motivations

Your teaching philosophy statement is a tool that should benefit you, your cadets, and your leaders. Consider all three perspectives when you develop your statement. When you write it, first write from your perspective (after all, it is about YOU), but go back and read it from the perspective of your cadets and your leaders, even if you do not intend to share it with

them. Put yourself in the student role and read your own statement. How would you respond to this teacher and her methods in the classroom? Would you feel comfortable taking risks in class? Would you learn better? Would you be more motivated to continue to explore this course material if you had YOU as a teacher? Really critically evaluate your statement from your cadet's perspective, then do the same from

Write it from your perspective, but review it from the cadet's perspective and from a mentor's perspective

your leader's perspective and revise if necessary. Use caution, however, in over embellishing your teaching philosophy for your leaders. This is not your vitae where you showcase your myriad accomplishments as a teacher. This document is a place to describe your philosophy as a teacher. If you have trouble separating the personal you from the public you, then write two statements if you feel the need. The one I will be referring to in this article is the personal one that truly describes you as a teacher.

Organize your thoughts before you write and consider yourself as both a learner and a teacher. What motivates you to learn? How do you learn best? What enhancements or constraints influence your learning? What teaching outcomes do you hope for? What student-teacher relationship do you strive for? How do you know when you are getting through to your cadets? What methods, attitudes, behaviors, activities that you use are most successful? What values do you want to impart to your cadets? How do you assess your success as a teacher? How do you plan to improve? Give thought to these and other questions and write out your responses – you can later trim portions down to incorporate into your teaching philosophy.

Your written teaching philosophy statement should be 1 to 2 pages long. Consider it a living, working document always subject to inspection and change. The statement should be individual and reflective, it should describe your beliefs and attitudes and a teacher. Generally write in first per-

son narrative (I see myself as ...) but by all means, be creative. If you see yourself in the role of (prominent figure in history or your field), then weave in such references if they add clarity to your statement. Some English teachers might find poetry a good option – it is a personal statement, make it personal. Describe YOU in the classroom, your behaviors and motivations. Avoid sweeping platitudes (I advocate active learning...). Of course you advocate active learning, but how do you accomplish it in your classroom? Remember, while this statement is about you, it is about how you influence cadet learning and development.

You should customize your teaching philosophy statement to suit your needs and unique circumstances, but typical components include: A description of why you teach. What motivates you to teach? How is your teaching related to your other professional development activities? What

Teaching is a scholarly activity when it is: purposeful, reflective, documented, evaluated, and shared.

behaviors do you engage in as a teacher. Why? What learning environment, methods, strategies and practices do you employ? How do you evaluate effectiveness? What tools or feedback do you use? What are your plans for continued growth as a teacher?

Finally, since you might share the statement (with a mentor, cadets, leaders, etc.), it should be clear and informative. It should paint a clear picture of you as a teacher, rich with specific details. Try to make it at least somewhat interesting to read. Include a bit of relevant teaching and learning-related jargon. Do not overdo it, and do not try to impress, but your statement will be more useful if written using appropriate educator jargon.

References:

How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy, Gabriela Montell, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 27 Mar 2003.

How to Write a Teaching Philosophy for Academic Employment, American Chemical Society Dept of Career Services, Washington, DC, 2000.