USING A RUBRIC FOR DEVELOPING STATEMENTS OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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When writing your Statement of Teaching Philosophy (STP), avoid making statements that sound generic and theoretical. An STP should be a deeply personal document that not only reflects your beliefs, but makes direct connections to your practice and to student learning. To achieve this “internal consistency,” you must align your teaching claims with Beliefs, Actions, and Evidence (Kenny, 2010).

For example, if I claim that “I encourage students' active learning in class”, I should connect this to my beliefs that “research shows that engaged students learn better and that active learning strategies are more effective,” as well as include references to educational literature. I should then describe what I specifically do in class to encourage student engagement and active learning (Actions)—for example, “I use group work in class.” Finally, I should provide Evidence of student learning, such as examples of problems that groups discussed in class, samples of student feedback and evaluations, statistics on test results as compared with some objective benchmark, etc.

Kaplan et al. have expanded this idea of alignment, breaking the content of an STP into five characteristics that can be measured with a rubric:

1. Goals for student learning
2. Enactment of goals
3. Assessment of goals
4. Creating an inclusive learning environment
5. Structure, rhetoric and language

Each of the five categories is measured against specific descriptors under the headings “Excellent,” “Needs Work” and “Weak.” These descriptors capture specificity, disciplinary context, and the use of illustrative examples.

The first three categories are essentially the same as Beliefs, Actions and Evidence. Checking the alignment of your goals, methods and assessments is a reflective exercise that helps not just to develop one's STP, but to actually improve one's own teaching.

The fourth category, “Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment” is often not considered when writing an STP, but given our institutional and personal commitment to diversity, it has become an integral part of what we do in the classroom. Looking at each of our teaching claims through the lens of inclusivity, you will reflect on how you implement inclusive teaching, and see how to integrate inclusive teaching and learning throughout your STP.

The fifth is a self-check to ensure that the document sounds authentic and reflects you and your practice accurately. It will help to remove teaching jargon and generic language.
WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY?

As part of their research, Kaplan et al. surveyed search committees, asking them to rank the most important characteristics of an STP. The results revealed the top characteristics of a good STP to be:

1. Offers evidence of practice—specific examples of how theory is linked with actual teaching experiences
2. Student centered, attuned to differences in student ability, learning style or level—specific evidence of methods of instruction and assessment that go beyond traditional lecture and testing methodology, and that address the diversity of the student body
3. Demonstrates reflectiveness—specific examples of struggle with instructional challenges and how they were resolved, of changes made, and of the outline of future development as a teacher
4. Conveys valuing of teaching—a tone or language that conveys enthusiasm for teaching and of considering it on par with research pursuits
5. Well written, clear and readable.

Conversely, the two top characteristics of an unsuccessful STP were:

1. Generic, full of boiler-plate language, and not taken seriously
2. Provides no evidence of practice.

REFERENCES
