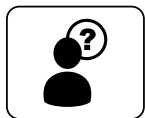


# Teaching Statement



## Overview

A teaching statement is used in job applications for academic positions, teaching positions in K-12, charter schools, and private boarding schools, and sometimes for training positions in organizations. The Teaching Statement should be 1-2 pages and give a vivid snapshot of your teaching. Use the first person when you write this document to explain your central approach, articulate your impact, and outline specific examples of strategies, assessments and evidence of outcomes from your teaching experience. A teaching statement can also be part of a more robust teaching portfolio for some applications, so it is important to keep a record of all teaching experiences, including evaluations. The teaching statement introduces and contextualizes the materials in a portfolio when a portfolio is requested.

## Developing a Teaching Philosophy

Teaching statements are sometimes called teaching philosophies because ideally they present an integrated vision of your teaching values and methods, motivated by a well-developed understanding of how students learn best and how your teaching methods facilitate this learning effectively. Many pedagogical principles work across disciplines, and you should be proactive about learning pedagogical best practices as well as pedagogical techniques and debates that may be field specific. There are also growing opportunities for training at UCLA through the Office of Instructional Development (OID), the Center for Education Innovation and Learning in the Sciences (CEILS), and the Center for the Integration for Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL). We encourage you to take advantage of the TA conference that occurs right before fall quarter every year, the TA training program, as well as other resources and programs available through OID (<https://oid.ucla.edu/tatp>). In addition, CEILS and CIRTL offer workshops and teacher training (see for example <https://ceils.ucla.edu/cirtl-at-ucla/>).

## Developing as a Teacher

While training in pedagogy is very important, you can promote your own development as a teacher by regularly reflecting on your teaching. Like ethnographers, you can take notes regularly after teaching sessions as a way to process how well instructional practices are working. We encourage you to take notes when things go well, when things don't go well, and when the unexpected or interesting happens. These notes are for your development and never need to be shared, but this reflective writing facilitates productive thinking about your teaching methods and provides a record of examples that can eventually be used when you need to develop a formal teaching statement or portfolio for the job application.

## Getting Started: Questions to ask yourself before you begin.

- What are your goals for yourself? Your students?
- What was your best teaching experience? Your worst?
- What is an example that demonstrates learning from a teaching mistake and implementing what you have learned?
- What are your strengths as a teacher? Weaknesses? How can you improve your weaknesses?
- What do you believe about how students learn best?
- How do you implement your philosophies on teaching and learning in the classroom? What strategies do you use?
- How do I know the strategies I have implemented work? How do you assess student learning?
- How does this relate to your teaching philosophy?

## Writing Tips

Use vivid language but use words with emotional connotations sparingly. It is better to convey passion through evidence than through literally saying words like “passion.” While we recommend writing in the first person pronoun, try not to overuse “I”, and keep the focus of your description on what your students are doing and learning in the classroom.

*This example is excerpted from a teaching statement by Tahseen Shams, who received a PhD in 2018. Dr. Shams is now an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto.*

I find teaching, both as a process of learning and the passing on of knowledge, extremely challenging, and yet, equally rewarding. As a teacher, I want to impart to my students the same sense of wonder I felt years ago when I first read C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination*. My approach to teaching, thus, is to nurture students so they can think critically about how larger social processes shape their personal experiences and of those around them. I encourage my students to identify social problems and scientifically pursue their intellectual curiosities, providing them support to develop those interests along the way.

In the classroom, I constantly strive to understand my students' personal life experiences so that I can present class materials in ways that would make sociology relevant to their lives. My class discussions incorporate a combination of classical and contemporary theoretical literatures as well as the personal views students bring with them to the classroom. For example, as a teaching assistant affiliated with UCLA's Academic Advancement Program, I helped teach "Introduction to Cultural Geography," a course in which many of the students were children of immigrants, racial minorities, and first-generation college students. I was responsible for two discussion sections (each with 20 students and held twice a week), for which I created a syllabus, gave lectures on readings not covered by the main instructor (roughly half), facilitated discussions, held office hours, and graded all materials turned in by students. The readings reviewed in section included selected works of numerous social scientists including Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Erving Goffman, and Clifford Geertz. Some of my guiding questions to encourage students to engage critically with the readings were: "What is the main argument of the text?," "Do you agree or disagree, and why?," "How does the text apply to real-life situations?"

In one of the class discussions, students were assigned to read Erving Goffman, Clifford Geertz, Denis Cosgrove, and Doreen Massey under the overarching themes of place, interactions, and meaning-making. Going around the room, I found that the students, many of whom were beginning to see the world sociologically for the first time, struggled to grasp how the abstract notions of time, space, and place shaped individuals' interactions on the ground or how the assigned readings could relate to everyday life. I asked my students to describe the classroom setting including where and how they were located in it. Based on their descriptions, I explained the Goffmanian concepts of props, performance, and presentation of self as based on context. I then asked the students to share how they think their experiences and interactions within the same classroom could be different from each other based on gender, race, class, and generation of college education. Taking the classroom as a microcosm of the larger society, the students were engaged to think about how social norms, power dynamics, and historical precedence shaped these interactions. I found this strategy of asking students and combining their narratives with scholarly discourses to be an effective way to convey the ways in which social science is useful in viewing the world. At the end of each class, I asked my students to write and submit a self-reflection piece incorporating the readings and examples from outside the assigned texts. These in-class submissions were an excellent reflection of the students' performance as they captured each student's grasp of the material and their ability to apply sociological concepts to their own lives. Nothing gave me greater joy to learn at the end of the course that a handful of my students changed their majors to sociology, having been inspired by our class discussions to learn more about the discipline.

What indicators best reflect students' growth? How do you assess learning, and how does this approach fit with your teaching philosophy?

Introduce your central teaching philosophy – How do you approach teaching and learning in the classroom?

Give concrete examples as evidence. These examples can include classroom interactions, realizations, lesson plans, challenges, and even lessons you have learned from mistakes.

Present a glimpse into your classroom. This example describes how challenging materials were approached in a creative way.