

Analyzing Disciplinary Ways of Talking About Teaching in Statements of Teaching Philosophy

For each of the following teaching statement excerpts, how do GSIs successfully represent themselves as members of academic fields who articulate discipline-specific teaching approaches?

Statement excerpt 1: By emphasizing the scientific process in lecture, I teach students how to think and write like scientists. In L113: Biology Lab and Discussion, I recognized that my students had a deficiency in interpreting their own experimental results and presenting them in a scientific manner. To address this, we spent the next lesson analyzing data from real journal articles and critiquing the authors' representation and interpretation. I created a handout with examples of misleading data so they could avoid misrepresenting their own results, as well as identify these errors in journal articles or media sources. Furthermore, I discarded the generic lab report guidelines in the student manual and created new guidelines to reinforce the scientific method and teach my students the significance of each step. To further instruct students how to think critically, I engage them with current scientific literature. While we discussed genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) in C105: Biology of Food, an article by Seralini *et al.* (2012) was receiving daily media coverage and causing new food policies to be adopted worldwide. Many of my students were using it to support their own aversion for GMOs. Together, we read the paper, critiqued the experiments, and discussed the conclusions in class. Equipped with knowledge from the course, my students identified problems with some of the experimental design used in the paper. They also recognized that the authors made some broad conclusions that were not supported by the actual experiments. More importantly, I was able to connect the science of genetic engineering with something currently in the news and relevant to my students.

Statement excerpt 2: Another assignment with which I am experimenting is "performing ethnography". While my initial reaction to Victor Turner's idea of performing ethnography was quite negative, I also see its potential as a teaching tool. My own ambivalence and curiosity about this technique encouraged me to seek student reactions to it. The goal of this assignment is for students to question and evaluate for themselves the usefulness of a controversial technique. As a result, I hope that students will take a more active role in their own learning. I chose a Judeo-Christian wedding ceremony as our ritual because it is familiar to many American college students. We do this in conjunction with reading Turner's work. After enacting the ritual, students evaluate their experience looking at the potential benefits and drawbacks of the technique. In this exercise and throughout my course I encourage students to approach material critically, never accepting something just because it was assigned or because of a theorist's reputation. Based on an informal survey administered after the activity, my initial experiment with this concept had positive results, but could be improved by giving students extended exposure to the ritual through an appropriately selected ethnography. This is an activity I will continue to refine and I anticipate it being the subject of a systematic classroom research study the next time I have the opportunity to teach this class.

Statement excerpt 3: By the end of the semester, students have produced and performed German language presentations, dialogs, and videos that tell a story, inform or persuade their classmates. In my first semester course, for example, students produced videos introducing their favorite places on campus. I made sure that the prompt was narrow enough in focus that students could accomplish the task; yet broad enough that they could work creatively. I then offered individual help with pronunciation and encouraged students to formulate scripts using familiar vocabulary and structures. After the students published their videos in an online classroom environment, I assigned informal peer review. Students posted comments relating to content and linguistic accuracy, thus mediating language use and communication for each other.

Hatcher

Graduate Student Development program

Considering the successful representations of disciplinary-specific teaching approaches that you identified above, how might you diagnose where the following statement falls short and coach the GSI who authored the statement to make improvements in this area?

Statement 4: By establishing student engagement with course material, I aim to develop their critical thinking skills. One of the ways I do so is by assigning several writing assignments throughout the semester. These assignments vary based on the course and include: response papers, in-class writing assignments, formal research papers and short answer essay questions on exams. Through these assignments I offer students critical feedback and help them develop their writing skills. In my Introduction to Sociology class I assign several response papers which offer a space for students to voice their questions and reactions to class material. Students submit these papers before class begins, giving them time to process their reactions and thoughts to course material prior to class. The assignments also give me an opportunity to see student reactions prior to the course. I routinely incorporate themes in student writing assignments into class discussion and restructure lectures to address student questions. I find that these writing assignments result in rich class discussions, since students come to class after reflecting on the readings, and are then more prepared to better engage in class. This in turn allows us to spend more time in class discussing the material in a scholarly manner. Less time is needed covering basic definitional components of the material, freeing the class to focus more on critically weighing evidence provided and connecting concepts to other aspects of social life.