

# Writing a Teaching Statement

Academic Job Search Series

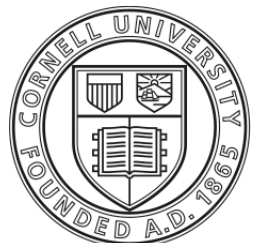
*July 2017*

**Colleen McLinn, PhD**

CU-CIRTL Program Director

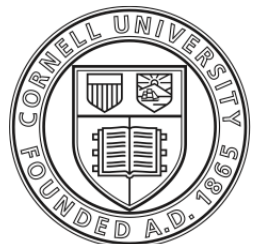
[cu-cirtl@cornell.edu](mailto:cu-cirtl@cornell.edu)

**[www.gradschool.cornell.edu/academic-series](http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/academic-series)**



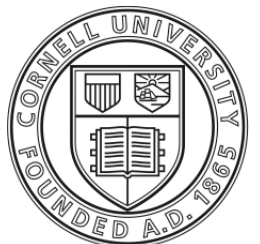
# Quote from Mary Anne Lewis, Ohio Wesleyan University

- <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/734-teaching-statement-as-self-portrait>



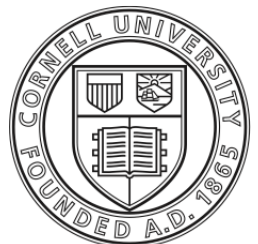
# POLL

- How many of you have read a teaching statement?
- How many of you have drafted a teaching statement?
- What are they used for?



# What is a teaching statement for?

- Included as part of an academic job application package
  - Possibly examined later in the application process than your CV and cover letter
  - An opportunity to expand in some depth on experiences that you summarized in a single line on your CV or cover letter
- Serves as a writing sample for the search committee and future colleagues
- Used in annual performance reviews or review for tenure



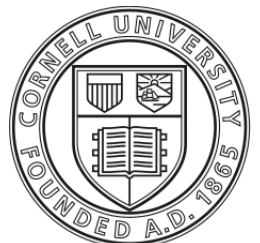
# **Assistant Professor, Tenure Track - Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Western Connecticut State University** (posted Fall 2015)

...We are seeking a broadly trained cell biologist who will complement the existing teaching and research strengths of our Department... Applicant will be expected to teach upper-level courses in cell biology, developmental biology, and to contribute to the teaching of introductory biology courses... Candidates should demonstrate evidence of excellence in teaching and mentoring undergraduates...

*Interested candidates should submit the following documents:*

- CV that highlights relevant teaching experience
- Cover letter that addresses the candidate's interest in working at a primarily teaching institution
- Statement of teaching philosophy, experience, and interests that includes evidence of teaching excellence...

<https://chroniclevitae.com/jobs/0000908007-01>



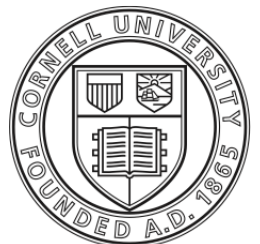
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## **What kinds of things might you include/discuss in this teaching statement?**

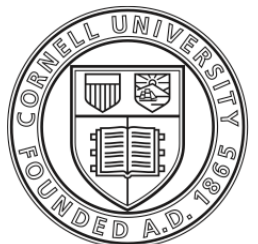
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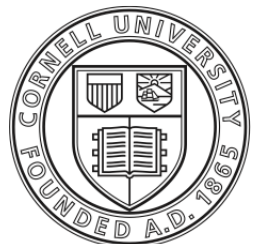
# What kinds of things might you include/discuss in this teaching statement?

- Courses you have developed or TA'd
- Courses that you are qualified to teach
- Ideas on how to structure the courses they expect applicants to teach
- Experience mentoring undergraduates, summer REU students
- How you approach assessment/collect evidence of student learning
- Feedback from teaching evaluations



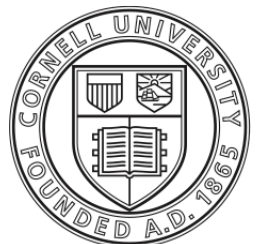
# What should you definitely not do?

- Don't mention your lack of teaching experience or gaps in your skillset. Be positive only in this statement
- Don't make unsubstantiated claims
- Don't use lots of jargon (whether about teaching or research)
- Don't actually get too philosophical about teaching (in the final version)
- Don't use the wrong school's name
- Don't plagiarize





# **Understanding the context in which a teaching statement is reviewed**

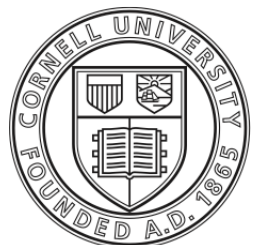


# Context: Landscape of Higher Education

- Tight job market, increasing number of adjunct/contingent faculty positions
- Stay away from language such as “calling”, “passion”, “vocation” that might seem naïve or unrealistic
- Search committees are reading a lot of applications, and you need to be straightforward, clear, and not trite

Credit: Karen Kelsky, *The Professor Is In*

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1470-vitaewednesday-teaching-statement-dos-and-don-ts>

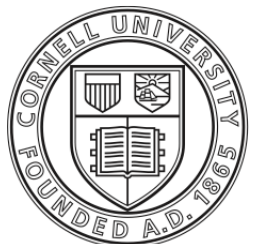


# What should you discuss, primarily?

- The WHAT
  - What you have taught, what you are prepared to teach
- The HOW
  - Show/describe how you approach teaching
- A little on the WHY you teach in a certain way is okay, but...

Credit: Karen Kelsky, *The Professor Is In*

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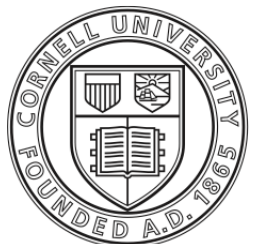


# Focus on Facts, Not Emotions

- Appeal to logic and present evidence using careful argumentation
- Focus on accomplishments, finished work (classes taught), outcomes
  - At early stages, you might not have much
- Show, don't just tell (give examples)
- Avoid words like “passionate”, “thrilled”, and be careful/sparing with “believe”
- Do not start with ancient history or yourself as a student (meaningful teachers you had)

Credit: Karen Kelsky, *The Professor Is In*

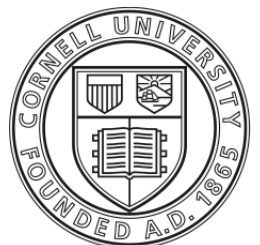
<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1470-vitaewednesday-teaching-statement-dos-and-don-ts>



# Tips for getting started

- Look at the list of courses in the ad, or offered by the department. Describe which courses you're qualified to teach.
- If you've taught the equivalent of any of the courses already, write a paragraph:
  - what you did with the class (especially if it was innovative),
  - how you assessed your students' learning,
  - how you assessed the effectiveness of your teaching,
  - what went well.

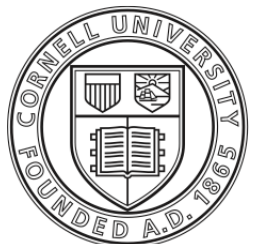
Credit: Shoshanna Cole, Cornell PhD, 2015



# Tips for getting started

- Think about what kinds of classes you would like to teach, and why.
  - Introductory classes, where you can give potential majors their first taste of your field?
  - Advanced courses for students who want to go on to graduate school?
  - General education courses, where you can cultivate literate citizens?

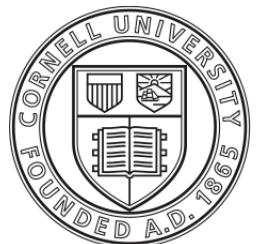
Credit: Shoshanna Cole, Cornell PhD, 2015



# Tips for getting started

- Consider: What skills do you want your students to develop?
  - Some of these may be directly related to your discipline (e.g., proper lab techniques),
  - Others may be general skills (e.g., critical thinking skills)

Credit: Shoshanna Cole, Cornell PhD, 2015

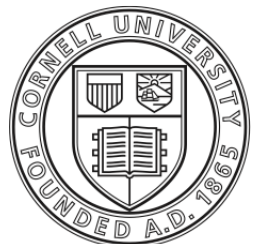


# Tips for getting started

- Also think about: What mentoring have you done?
  - How did you guide your mentees?
  - What did you find satisfying about that experience?
- How would you approach mentoring students at a different stage? (or different types of individuals)

This may fit more appropriately in the research statement in some cases.

Credit: Shoshanna Cole, Cornell PhD, 2015

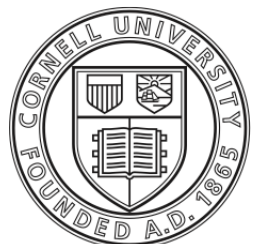




# Karen Kelsky's Four-Paragraph Template

1. Brief, overarching goals and a general description of your pedagogy
2. Specific courses you've taught and methods you've used. (Not in a chronological order.)
3. More of the same idea on a different theme (a different teaching method – e.g., an online course, different course material, or a different student audience. Or, expand on assessment.)
4. Wrap up on hopes for what your students get out of your courses, moving forward.

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1470-vitaewednesday-teaching-statement-dos-and-don-ts>

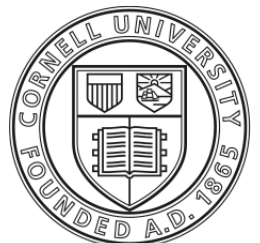


# Specific Considerations

- Course Design
  - What are the best uses of in- and out-of-class time to support the desired learning outcomes?

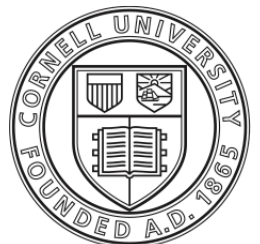
|                          |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |                      |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|----------------------|
| In-Class Activities:     | ? |   | ? |   |  |  |  |  |  | Assessm't & Feedback |
| Out-of-Class Activities: |   | ? |   | ? |  |  |  |  |  |                      |

“Castle top” template from Dee Fink’s *Self-Directed Guide for Designing Courses for Significant Learning*  
[www.deefinkandassociates.com/index.php/resources/](http://www.deefinkandassociates.com/index.php/resources/)





# More Questions to Consider

- Is there anything that you [would] do in your classroom that sets you apart from most people in your field?
- How do you assess your students' learning?
- How do you assess your effectiveness as a teacher?



# Specific Considerations

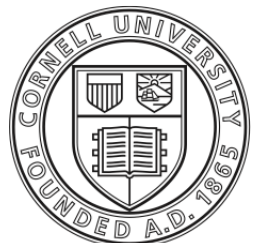
- Assessment of Student Learning

|   | Teaching<br>What we are doing | Learning<br>What students are doing  |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Formative Assessment</b><br>Low stakes, gather<br>feedback, track progress       |                               | <br>Focus mainly on<br><b>student learning</b> in<br>teaching statements<br>for faculty job<br>applications |
| <b>Summative Assessment</b><br>High stakes, evaluate<br>learning against a standard |                               |    |

Credit:

University of North Florida, Office of Faculty Enhancement

[www.unf.edu/ofe/teaching\\_learning/Assessment.aspx](http://www.unf.edu/ofe/teaching_learning/Assessment.aspx)



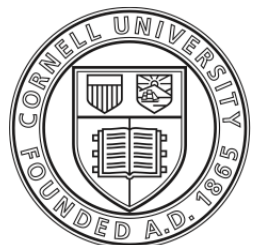
# Assessment – Teaching Statement Excerpt

“As an instructor, the blog also provided weekly opportunities for me to assess (rather than formally evaluate) the students’ interests, overall learning progress, and questions regarding the readings...

“Together with more formal evaluative assignments (short and long papers, presentations, and quizzes), these feedback opportunities provide me with critical access to my students’ thinking and the scope of their learning.”

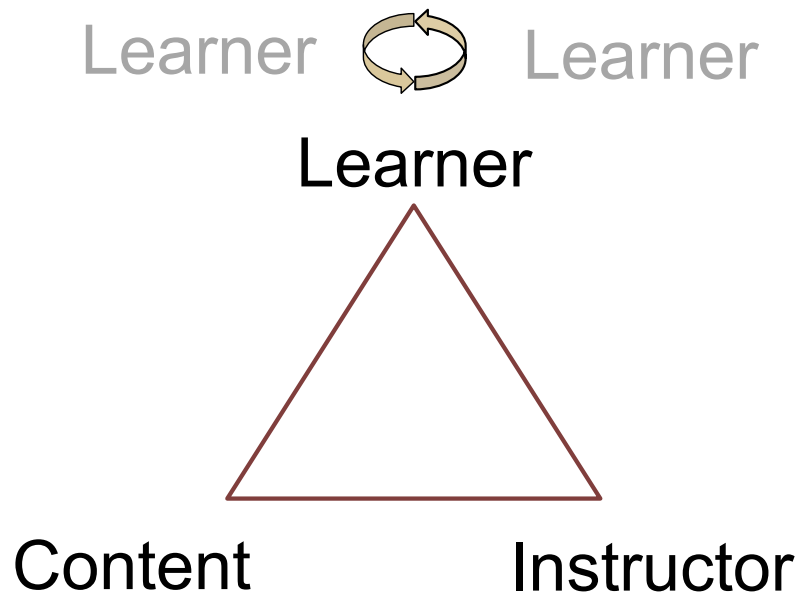
Credit: Laura Ambrose

[http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/Ambrose.pdf](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/Ambrose.pdf)



# Specific Considerations: Inclusive Teaching

- Consider 3 types of interaction



## Learner-Content Interactions

- how participants experience content;
- how content can be adapted and varied

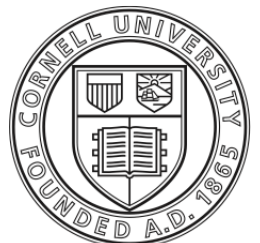
## Learner-Instructor Interactions

- respectful teaching behaviors;
- accessibility for all participants...

## Learner-Learner Interactions

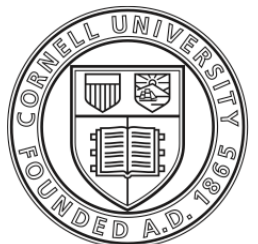
- Setting the tone for respectful inclusion in collaborative work;
- respect for the ideas of all and recognition of their value

Credit: Don Gillian-Daniel, University of Wisconsin-Madison (after Moore, 1989; Anderson & Garrison, 1998), see: [www.cirtl.net/p/resources](http://www.cirtl.net/p/resources)



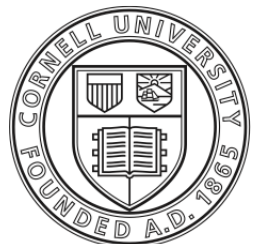
# What if you don't have much teaching experience?

- First, address the courses that you'd be qualified to teach. This should be tailored to the institution to which you're applying – read through the department website or the institution's course catalog.
- If you're not applying to a particular school yet, look at an appropriate department at the type of institution where you'd like to teach.



# What if you don't have much teaching experience?

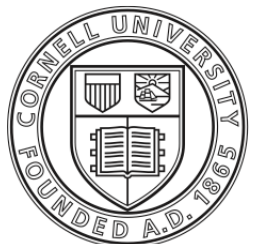
- Think back to when you took (or TA'ed) the equivalent of some of these courses. Were there any assignments, lessons, or teaching methods that you found particularly effective (or particularly ineffective)? Is there anything that you'd emulate? What would you change?
- CAUTION: You do not want to be portraying yourself as a student, so make sure all your actual statements in the document portray yourself as a (future) instructor. "I find..."





# What if you don't have much teaching experience?

- Describe how you would teach a particular course in general terms.
  - How would you design the course?
  - Would you incorporate themes to connect different topics throughout the course?
  - What sorts of assignments would you require?
  - What skills would you want your students to develop through the course?

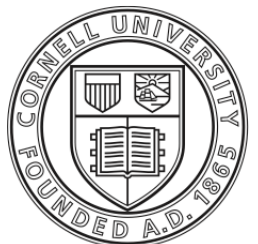


## For Example:

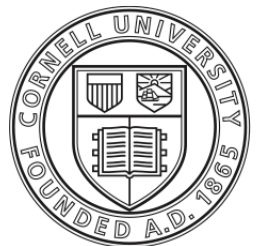
“When teaching \_\_\_\_\_ course, I [would] use a project-based method and design the course around [assignment examples].

“Students work on this over the course of the semester, doing things like \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, which addresses \_\_\_\_\_ learning outcomes or builds \_\_\_\_\_ skills.”

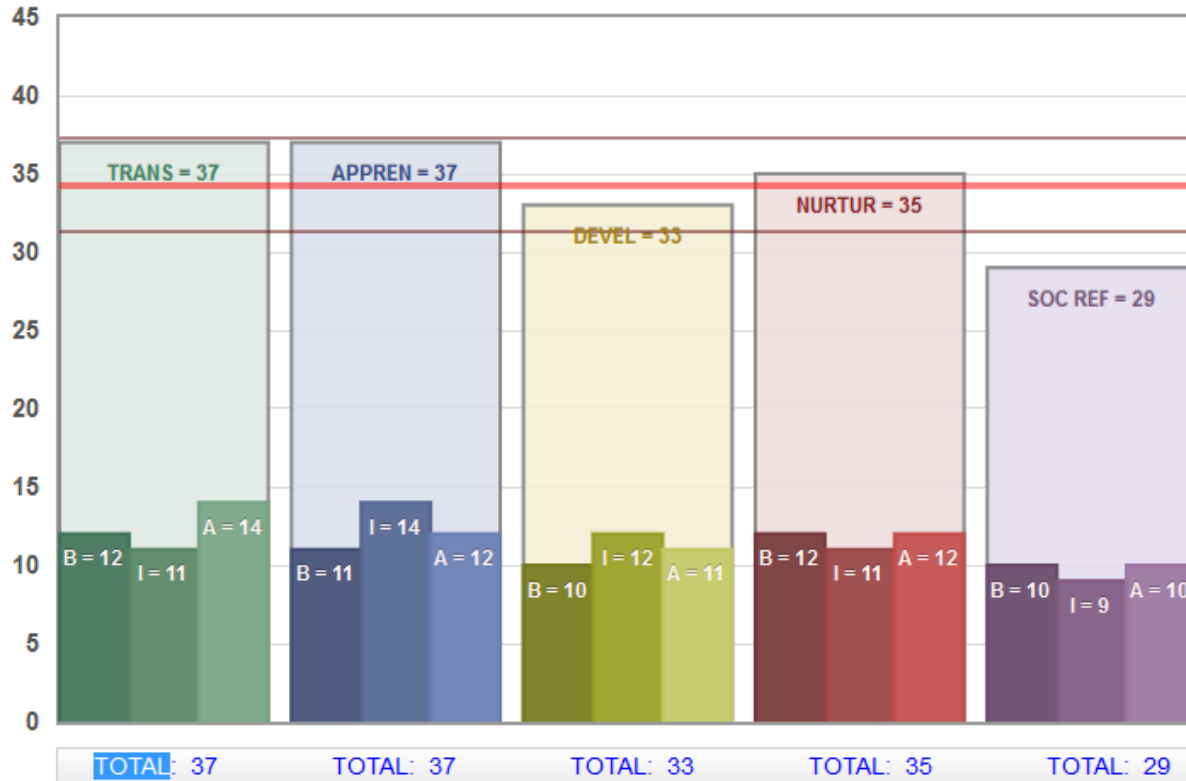
Credit: Shoshanna Cole, Cornell PhD, 2015



# **Some tools for reflection on your beliefs**



# Teaching Perspectives Inventory



Perspective totals on or above this line are DOMINANT for you.

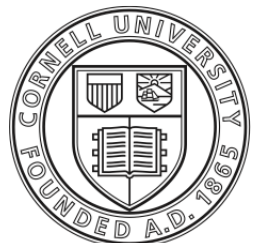
Mean: 34.2  
SD:  $\pm 2.99$

Perspective totals on or below this line are RECESSIVE for you.

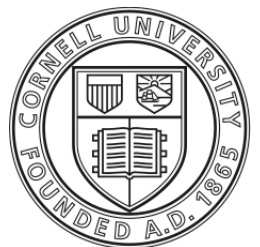


**B = Beliefs** What you believe about teaching and learning.  
**I = Intentions** What you try to accomplish in your teaching.  
**A = Actions** What you do when you're teaching.

[www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/](http://www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/)

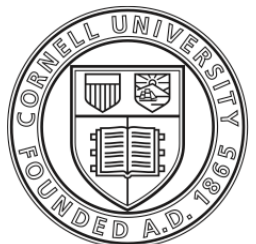


# Exercises

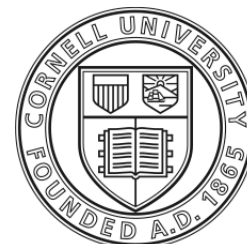


# Word Clouds

- Put draft statements through word cloud generators to get a quick overview
- Identify key words that correctly represent your philosophy or personal theory of teaching
- Resources:
  - <http://www.wordle.net/create>
  - <http://www.tagxedo.com>

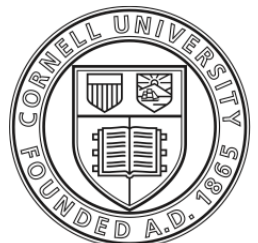


# Statement of Siddarth Chandrasekaran, Cornell PhD Student, Chemistry



# Resources

- **ALS 6015** - The Practice of Teaching in Higher Education (Kimberly Williams, kw299)
- **Online workshops** from the CIRTl Network:
  - <https://www.cirtl.net>
- Vitae, Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015 – How to Write a Teaching Statement that Sings
  - <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1114-how-to-write-a-teaching-statement-that-sings>
- University of Minnesota – A step-by-step guide to writing a teaching philosophy statement:
  - <http://cei.umn.edu/support-services/tutorials/writing-teaching-philosophy>
- Cornell University Graduate School
  - <http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/career-services/teaching-philosophy-statement>





**Questions/Concerns?  
Other Resources?**

