WRITING A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
SUGGESTIONS FROM THE CAPELLA CAREER CENTER

Applicants for college and university teaching positions are frequently asked to submit a statement of teaching philosophy along with their curriculum vitae (CV), cover letter, and other application materials. While there are some consistent themes, different universities and colleges look for different content. In addition to the suggestions below, make sure to pay close attention to the instructions provided in the application.

PERSONALIZATION

In writing your philosophy, you will want to ensure you stay true to yourself. As part of the hiring process, you will likely be asked to demonstrate your skills in the course room as well as talk at length in an interview. If your representation of yourself varies across these different settings, your candidacy will not go far. This means that your philosophy must authentically represent who you are as a teacher.

By reading through this document, you want the dean or department chair to have a sense of what a student would experience in a course with you. This can include teaching methods (and your understanding of, and plans for, different learning styles), assessment strategies, and classroom management. Because teaching extends beyond the classroom, you will also want to consider highlighting the other things you would do including lesson planning, one-on-one tutoring, and mentoring.

As you craft your philosophy, it will be helpful to include examples. It carries significantly more weight if you have demonstrated experience than if you just have a theory. If you do not have teaching experience in higher education, you can still bring in examples from other relevant experiences you have. These can include trainings you have conducted, presentations you have given, and mentoring/tutoring you have done in your professional life. If you do include elements from a different field, you will want to communicate clearly how they relate to teaching in higher education. When your theory or approach was influenced by specific experiences you had, you will want to include these; this is especially beneficial if your philosophy has changed due to these experiences.

CUSTOMIZATION

Just as one teacher is not like another, so is one university not like another. Doing research on the institution, college, school, and department where the position is housed would also serve you well. You will also want to keep the job posting close by as you write your teaching philosophy, because it will have key insights that will inform what you should choose to include. Because every institution focuses on a different type of student and approach to education, you will want to make sure you are demonstrating your qualifications to teach those specific students in that particular educational setting. For example, an online teaching role will require different qualities than one where you would be teaching face-to-face. Further, an undergraduate teaching role will have different expectations than a graduate one. Ultimately, you want this document to show that you have an understanding of the students you would teach and the institution where you are applying.

By tailoring your teaching philosophy, you can ensure that you are calling out the parts of your philosophy that will most closely resonate with that institution and hiring manager. This extra step of work will help you come across as both a qualified teacher and a person who fits within that institution and culture.
WRITING QUALITY

As with your CV and cover letter, your teaching philosophy should be error free and written in complete sentences with proper grammar, word use, and punctuation. With the higher education emphasis across disciplines on quality academic writing, you will be expected to hold your students to a high standard regardless of the subjects you would teach. Because of this, your documents will give the institution insight into your ability to write at the college-level and likely your ability to produce the same quality in your students.

If you aren't a strong writer, seek out resources to improve your document and bring it in line with standard expectations for candidates applying for college teaching positions. Capella’s Writing Center has excellent resources on academic and professional writing that you can use to improve your written work. You can also reach out to people you know who are skilled writers and editors to review your statement of teaching philosophy.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Not all institutions will request a teaching philosophy as part of the hiring process. However, you will likely still be expected to have one you can articulate. During the interview process, you will typically be questioned at length about your theoretical and practical approach to teaching. By taking the time to develop this document for each position you seek, you will set yourself up well to have a healthy dialogue about your philosophy during the interview.

For additional assistance with your teaching philosophy or other application documents, please visit the Capella Career Center on Campus iGuide.