

WRITING YOUR  
TEACHING  
PHILOSOPHY

# CONSIDERATIONS

**Length** • Limit to 1-2 pages. Keep it concise, clear and cogent.

**Content** • Know your audience; a statement for a conservatory should be targeted differently than one for a small liberal arts college.

- Avoid simply rehashing the CV.
- Make sure several people you know review for clarity and style.
- Portray yourself as a life long learner, not the “expert.”
- Use first person (i.e., “I believe that . . .”) and present tense (“In my classroom, students feel engaged and motivated to . . .”)--exceptions for when you are describing what you have done in courses taught in the past and what you will do in courses planned for the future.
- Avoid technical jargon--your statement may be read by committee members from outside your discipline or even outside of music. One of the hallmarks of effective teaching is the ability to explain concepts to audiences who are not experts in the field.
- Consider multiple statements for multiple profiles (i.e., research universities, comprehensive universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges--and, teaching theory vs. performance or lecture vs. lab classes)

# CONSIDERATIONS

- Content**
- Make it personal, avoid clichés. (“I love music, and I love sharing my knowledge and skills with others”)
  - Explain specifically why you are passionate about **teaching** music. Describe the enjoyment and fulfillment you receive from watching your students develop as musicians and persons.
  - Your statement should reflect deep thinking about the teaching profession. Include any prominent education theorists (Howard Gardner, Piaget, Dewey, etc.) who have influenced your thinking. Or discuss what you have learned from studying with former or current teachers, and from taking master classes with distinguished pedagogues.
  - Emphasize any specific training that you’ve had in music teaching methods, such as Orff, Kodaly, Suzuki, etc.
  - Describe what you emphasize most in your teaching; what are the three most important values (*consistency, perseverance and development of strong fundamentals*) in your approach to working with students? What are the hallmarks of your teaching style?
  - Remember: you are teaching people, not technique! So make sure you address what you hope for your students to get out of their study beyond being technically proficient!

"You don't want to pitch large auditorium classes to a liberal-arts college, because they don't do that. That's not their style. Their mission is to give personal service to students. Whereas here at Whatsamatta State\*, we've got 35,000 students. We're a school that offers education to a wide variety of people, and we have large classes, so if you have experience teaching large classes, that's important and would be essential to put into a teaching statement."

\* not the real name of the school ;)

## RESOURCES . . .

- [http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching/forms/Sample%20Teaching%20Statements%20\(ALL\).pdf](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching/forms/Sample%20Teaching%20Statements%20(ALL).pdf)
- <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/teaching%20statement.pdf>

## EXAMPLES . . .

### **TEACHING & ADVISING**

I believe that the enterprises of scholarship, teaching/advising, and service/community engagement are not only mutually informing, but that the cross-fertilization of these constructs is inevitable and, in fact, desired. While many in education hypothesize about the “gap” that too often exists between theory and practice and look for ways to bridge it, I believe that there may always be a sort of desirable friction, or “rub” between the theoretical and the practical, and that it is this tension that produces the creative energy needed to produce what we consider to be “best practices” in music teaching and learning.

An example of this integration between teaching and scholarship can be seen in the development of my undergraduate instrumental methods course. I have taught this course, in various permutations, many times over the last 10 or so years, and in so doing have been engaged in a nearly continuous cycle of reflection and revision. I trace these changes—in the course, my students and myself—in a Journal of Music Teacher Education article, “From ‘Occasional Visitors’ to Professional Development Partnership: The Evolution of an Instrumental Music Methods Course.” evaluation procedure.

My research interest in beginning music teachers also informs my role as Coordinator of Music Student Teaching (MUS495), in which I am responsible for assigning all music student teachers to their internships, teaching the weekly Student Teaching Seminar and supervising the work of our graduate teaching assistants who observe our student teachers.

## EXAMPLES . . .

At the graduate level, my teaching responsibilities during the academic year include two courses: Seminar in Qualitative Research in Music Education, and Seminar in College Music Teaching. I also teach a number of graduate seminars during our annual summer masters degree program for practicing music educators, including Introduction to Research, Seminar in Curriculum and Methodology, Psychology of Music, and Graduate Instrumental Conducting. This summer I am offering a workshop for music teachers on Michigan's new teacher evaluation system, combining my research interest in policy with the needs of our colleagues in the schools as they grapple with the challenges of this new evaluation system.

Graduate advising is another important component of my teaching profile, and is a responsibility that I take very seriously. Since coming to MSU in 2003 I have advised 10 dissertations, and each of my advisees has secured a tenure-track position in higher education. I have also served as a dissertation committee member for 16 additional doctoral students during this time, and have worked hard to help each of these students find a university position. The Seminar in College Music Teaching, a course I designed when I began teaching at MSU, provides an example of the integration of my teaching and service philosophies. This course offers students insights into the structures and governance protocols that organize collegiate teaching, while also providing practical information on applying and interviewing for jobs, and advice on the tenure and promotion process.