

Graduate Teaching at Albany

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UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

State University of New York

SKILL Conference

Saturday, March 8, 2008
9am-3pm



Keynote Workshop: Virginia S. Lee, Ph.D.

Dr. Lee is a specialist in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education, with a particular focus on Inquiry-Based Learning.

Deadline for Proposals February 15, 2008

The Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership is pleased to announce our 4th annual SKILL (Sharing Knowledge, Insights, and Lessons Learned) Conference. This conference offers an opportunity for graduate students in teaching roles to showcase their accomplishments in the classroom by sharing their experiences and teaching tools with their peers across disciplines. Please visit the SKILL conference website for more information and to submit a proposal:

<http://skill.itlal.org/index.php>

www.albany.edu/teachingandlearning
or 442-5521

Reflective Teaching and Preparing for the Professoriate

The following is a test of the Emergency Job Search Preparation System. In the case of a real interview, your answers to this question would have consequences for the future of your academic career.

A job search committee asks what your philosophy of teaching is. You

(a) remind them that you are interviewing for a job in mathematics, not philosophy.

(b) cough loudly to stall for time and ask them to repeat the question while you scramble for ideas.

(c) answer with a summary of the statement of teaching philosophy you've written and offer to share a copy of this statement and your teaching portfolio with the committee.

If you answered a or b, you may not be as prepared for the academic job market as you think you are. You likely chose to pursue a career in academe because of your passion for your field of study—that's why most of us pursue an advanced degree. And while you were probably also excited about the prospect of sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with undergraduate students, you never dreamed how challenging and time-consuming teaching would be. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that all this work is not helping you achieve the ultimate goal of obtaining a tenure-track job. The fact is, however, that being able to reflect on and document your teaching is an increasingly important way to prepare for your role as a faculty member and is a requirement for positions in many fields.

Teaching effectively will be essential to your role as a faculty member no matter where you find your first job, and interviewers will want to see that you have thought about that part of your position. In fact, nearly 80% of Ph.D.'s who choose faculty careers end up in positions in two- and four-year colleges, or comprehensive universities, not research universities, often by choice (Golde and Dore 2001). Even research universities are increasingly invested in improving the quality of undergraduate education. So as you prepare yourself to make the transition from your role as a graduate student to that of a faculty member, you will want to think about how you can demonstrate that you are a thoughtful practitioner in your teaching as well as in your research.

The Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Portfolio

One common way to represent your teaching practice and elucidate your beliefs about why you do what you do in the classroom is to create a Teaching Statement (sometimes called a Statement of Teaching Philosophy). This document is a brief (usually 1-2 page) essay/narrative that explains your conception of teaching and learning, your values, and

your beliefs as a teacher. It also describes how you teach, why you teach that way, and provides examples that illustrate how your ideas are concretized in the classroom.

Beyond their usefulness for your own reflection and practice, Teaching Statements are increasingly required by universities as part of a candidate's application for a faculty job. A recent study of 26 Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degree-granting institutions, conducted by the University of Michigan, found that at least half of those institutions requested a Teaching Philosophy Statement from applicants at some point during the hiring process. For jobs in the Natural Sciences, that number was almost 80%. (Kaplan et al. 247). These numbers show that future faculty members are expected not only to know their discipline but also to be able to demonstrate their readiness to step into the classroom. And because the Teaching Statement forces you to articulate your beliefs, the act of writing one will help you speak more clearly about your teaching in an interview. A particularly well-crafted and highly individualized statement will help you to stand out from a large pool of applicants.

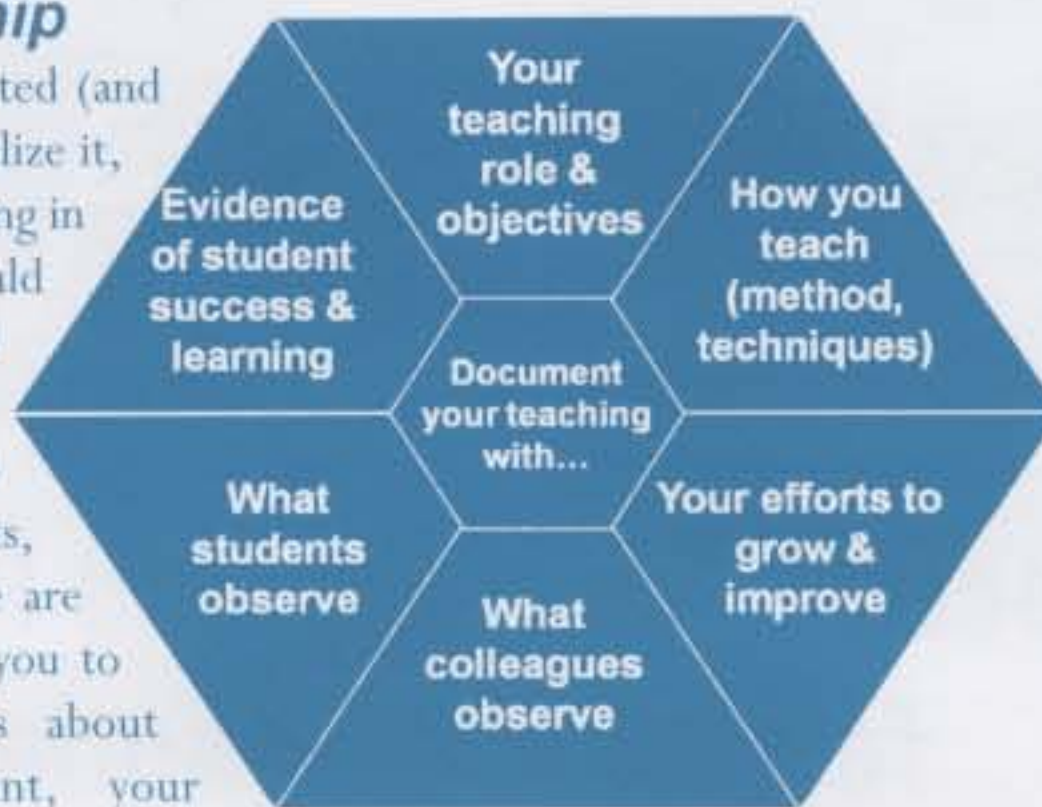
A strong Teaching Statement is the foundation for a Teaching Portfolio, which is a collection of materials that showcase your development and accomplishments as a teacher. Portfolios may contain a wide variety of items, but at the minimum will typically include, in addition to the teaching statement, information about courses you have taught, sample course materials, and evaluations of your teaching from supervisors, peers, and students. Assembling a portfolio while you are in graduate school will help you develop habits that will serve you well as a professor, since a teaching portfolio will ultimately be required in your application for tenure and promotion.

The graphic on page 2 offers a way to think about the dimensions of teaching that can be included in a portfolio.

(continued on page 2)

Teaching and Scholarship

Teaching can often seem like an isolated (and isolating) enterprise. You may not realize it, but chances are you are doing something in your classroom that other teachers could learn from, and vice versa. Informal conversations about teaching often happen among graduate students and faculty within and across departments, and those are productive. But there are also many formal opportunities for you to enter into substantive discussions about teaching within your department, your discipline, the University at Albany community, and the broader academic community. Participation in ITLAL's campus events on teaching is one way to join these discussions, while also helping you create a track record of improvement efforts for your portfolio. There are numerous books and journals (visit the ITLAL library) on university teaching, many of which focus specifically on approaches within particular disciplines. Finally, there are several regional and national conferences—both discipline-specific and general—devoted exclusively to the improvement of teaching and learning. Among the more popular of these are the Lilly Conferences, which welcome faculty presentations in all disciplines (<http://www.lillyconferences.org/>). These events allow you to gain experience in conference presentations while contributing to the national scholarly conversations about teaching and learning.



One local opportunity that you should not miss is the annual SKILL (Sharing Knowledge, Insights, and Lessons Learned) Conference here at UAlbany. This conference, sponsored by the Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership, allows graduate students in teaching roles to showcase their accomplishments in the classroom by sharing their experiences with their peers across disciplines. This year's conference features a keynote by Virginia S. Lee, expert on "teaching through inquiry," and will be held on March 8; for more information, visit the website: <http://skill.itlal.org/index.php>. Note that the due date for submission is February 15.

ASK ITLAL: The case of the surprised job candidate

Dear ITLAL,

I have been a graduate student at UAlbany for 5 years and a TA for several semesters. This year I'm teaching a section on my own, and am also starting to send out applications for faculty positions. The good news is that I was recently invited to a campus interview. The bad news: they want me to do a teaching demonstration with their students as an audience, and I have no idea how to prepare. Your thoughts?

Perplexed

Dear Perplexed,

Congrats on the campus interview. As for the teaching demo, don't stress over it—it's a great opportunity for you to showcase your experience and skill. Here's the key: you made it this far based on your impressive academic credentials, and now you need to show that you can connect with students. Rather than do a straight lecture, design your demo to show off your ability to engage students in your subject and to manage a classroom in which students are active participants. Depending on the discipline, use cases, problem-solving in groups, role plays, etc., anything to get students thinking and talking with you. Because you are a guest, the students will be on their best behavior, and are likely to respond enthusiastically to anything you try as a positive gesture toward you. Really! One more thing: be sure to talk through or informally rehearse your plan in advance, with someone you trust, who can provide feedback and anticipate audience response. And Good Luck!

Do you have a question for ITLAL? Email us at teachingandlearning@albany.edu and check future Graduate Teaching @ Albany newsletters for answers to your questions.

Sources:

Golde, Chris M, and Timothy M. Dore. *At Cross Purposes: What the Experiences of Today's Doctoral Students Reveal about Doctoral Education*. A Survey initiated by the Pew Charitable Trusts. January 2001.

Kaplan, Matthew et al. "A Research-Based Rubric for Developing Statements of Teaching Philosophy." *To Improve the Academy* 26 (2008): 242-257.

Additional Resources

Publications about Scholarly Teaching

Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning
<http://www.heldref.org/change.php>

The Chronicle of Higher Education
<http://chronicle.com/>

College Teaching
<http://www.heldref.org/ct.php>

International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
<http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsoitl/index.htm>

National Teaching & Learning Forum
<http://www.ntlf.com/>

Teaching Statements and Teaching Portfolios

Binghamton University Graduate School:
<http://gradschool.binghamton.edu/cs/professionaldevelopment.asp#TeachingPortfolios>

Ohio State University:
<http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio/>

Tufts University: <http://www.cs.tufts.edu/~ablumer/portfolio.html>

University of Texas-Austin:
<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachfolio.html>

Center for Instructional Development and Research, Washington University:
<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/Bulletin/TeachingStatement.html>

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