

# SAMPLE TEACHING STATEMENTS

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## 1. History sample

Teaching is exhilarating. I never feel more energized than after a class that has gone well. I remember feeling that way the first day I taught a seminar. The course was on Nationalism in American Politics and Culture, and we began by listening to Nuestra Himna, a controversial Spanish-language version of the national anthem, and to Toby Keiths Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue, with its chorus of Well put a boot in your ass, its the American way. We looked at various images of Americana, from the Statue of Liberty to paintings of westward expansion. Some students were talking, but others remained quiet. I was getting worried that I was losing them, so I turned off the projector and said, Okay then, everyone think for a second. Given what we've seen, what is the difference between Nationalism and Patriotism? Lets make a chart. Suddenly, conversation took off. Hands shot up. Answers flew around the room. Students responded to each other. I furiously wrote their ideas in a T-chart on the board. The question I had asked wasnt necessarily the best question, but it was the one they ran with. By the end of class each student was fully engaged. I had to work really hard to get them there. To keep discussion going, I had to move from song to image to text, searching for the right question. I felt like a prize fighter, bobbing and weaving, looking for the right combination. I was glad that I had prepared not only a Plan A, but also Plan B, C, and D. I had worked hard, it felt great, and I left class on a high for the rest of the day.

As a history teacher, I want my students to make connections. On one hand, I want them to develop and articulate a clear and coherent historical narrative: to make connections between events and people and institutions, to understand the forces of cause-and-effect and change-over- time. Sometimes the simplest teaching techniques can work the best. I use charts and diagrams and other visual representations to show relationships. My students routinely mention that the timelines we produce in class are their most valuable learning tools, especially the five-layer dip, where we construct a timeline with different categories layered on each other in different colors: for example, a twentieth-century Civil Rights time- line that places Presidential, Congressional, Supreme Court, African-American, and White Southern actions in conversation with each other. The visual impact of seeing how these events relate is powerful, and students learn that chronology is important and complicated.

At the same time, I want my students to develop a sense of historical empathy: to make connections with their subjects, to understand that history is not just the study of what happened but also the study of how it happened and of how people understood, explained, and lived with what happened. Sometimes I help my students do this through role-playing exercises. One of the most effective discussion sections I led was for a Civil War class, when I split my students into pairs, gave each pair a character such as Spotswood Rice, African-American Union soldier or Godfrey Bainbridge, white southern planter, and asked the question What was at stake for you in Reconstruction? and then Who might have been your ally? And at all times, I supplement secondary source readings with a steady stream of primary source material. I push my students to question these sources, to look past the words to the people who produced them, to look beyond the images to the context around them. Primary sources always trigger students deeper understanding of the forces of history. If I can help my students put themselves in the place of their subjects, I am one step closer to succeeding.

## **2. Music sample**

As a teacher, I aim to perpetuate knowledge and inspire learning. More specifically, as a musicologist I introduce students to a canon of musical works and ask them to articulate their reactions, not only presenting a repertoire but also teaching independent critical listening and thinking. To this end, I seek a balance in my courses between lecturing to students and asking them to make discoveries. I encourage students to engage with the topic at hand, with me, and with each other in the belief that good teaching depends upon intellectual exchange.

My approach to student assessment reflects my two goals. First, the student is expected to master a body of knowledge by demonstrating on exams a familiarity with those composers, pieces, terms, and concepts studied in the course. Second, students are given the opportunity to reflect upon the material at greater leisure in written assignments that emphasize the skills of critical thinking and listening acquired during the semester. While my standards are high, I help the students to meet expectations by providing office hours, review sessions, and the chance to submit draft papers and revisions.

I believe in a flexible manner of instruction, responsive to the unique atmosphere of a given class. In conducting either a large lecture or small seminar, I am aware of students different experiences and temperaments in hopes of developing their strengths while ameliorating their weaknesses. Every student, regardless of background, can improve his or her ability to listen to and understand a piece of music. In lectures, discussions, and assignments, I show that music responds to various modes of inquiry: analytic, hermeneutic, cultural, and historical; thus, students are equipped to explore the possibilities of each perspective and emboldened to push beyond their own experience to expand their skills. In the end, I have enriched a student's ability to think about, discuss, and listen to music with a new awareness of its aesthetic and humanistic significance.

### 3. Political Science sample

*There is, has been, and will always be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits. Its made up of all those who've consciously chosen their calling and do their job with love and imagination. Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it.*

– Wislawa Szymborska, 1996 Nobel Prize for Literature Lecture

Why do I teach? Here I borrow from a poet. Teaching is my chosen calling, a calling I strive to undertake with love and imagination, and from my location as a relatively new teacher, I see no end to improvement, no arrival, no completion: I want to be that teacher who, even after decades in the classroom, still leaves each session asking how the next might be better, how to better engage and inspire this unique set of students.

I bring three overarching objectives to the classroom, each of them rooted in my conception of teaching as an invitation to relationship. First, I invite students into relationship with the specific course material. As a teacher of politics in the context of a liberal education, I see my task as creating spaces for students to encounter at both a normative and empirical level fundamental questions of power, justice, identity, equality, and freedom, and to do so in a manner that connects with rather than builds walls between other subfields, disciplines, and modes of inquiry. I design my courses to stretch students in many ways imaginative and theoretical, empirical and normative, comparative and specific and an important measure of a student's success is his or her capacity, at the semesters end, to critically engage the course topic from a variety of perspectives and traditions. In addition to assessing a student's factual grasp of material (for example, a map quiz identifying countries and capitals in a course on South-east Asian Politics), I use exams, essay topics, and research projects that are open ended with no single correct answer. I am more interested in developing a students capacity to argue cogently, persuasively, and synthetically than in the particular content of his or her conclusions.

Inviting my students into relationship with the course material also means encouraging active and participatory learning, and whenever appropriate I bring students into direct engagement with primary sources before turning to the various mediations of secondary literature. Simulations, debates, role playing, thought experiments, and games are a regular part of my classes. In my Moral Foundations of Politics section, students take on the roles of hardline and moderate Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites in order to better understand the complex challenges of crafting a system of democratic representation in a divided society. When reading Robert Nozicks Anarchy, State, and Utopia, the class divides into anarchists and minimalists and debates the justification for the existence of the state. To explore John Rawls difference principle, students pair off and negotiate how to divide a pool of grade points starting from radically unequal positions. Recognizing that not all students

are temperamentally inclined to speak out in group settings, I also require regular written reactions to the readings, pushing students to go beyond mere summaries of the material, and I provide extensive feedback on this and other written work.

Second, I invite students into relationship with me and with each other. Early in the semester, I learn each of my student's names and something of their backgrounds, and I model and explicitly lay out guidelines that make passionate yet respectful exchanges of ideas possible. To the extent allowed by class size and subject matter, I seek out physical arrangements that place me in a circle with my students rather than as one set apart behind a podium. This attitude of accessible partnership extends beyond the classroom to my office hours, my willingness to read drafts and suggest revisions, my midterm and final review sessions, my availability by e-mail and phone, and the midterm and final evaluations of my teaching that allow me to adapt to the differing needs of each new group of students. I take seriously my responsibility to guide discussion and to explicate new or difficult material, but I do so in a manner that encourages rather than suffocates thoughtful dissent and lively questioning. For example, I often passionately engage a particular point of view and then turn with a sense of humor to critique my own exposition. To nurture a sense of ownership and involvement, I typically assign two students to start each class period with a series of provocative and thoughtful questions about the material. In addition, I require students to post their reading reaction assignments to a class list-serve, and in class I often reference these postings by name and encourage others to do the same. I find great joy in watching a classroom of strangers grow into an intellectual community of interlocutors over the course of the semester

Third, I invite students into relationship with the larger world around them. I am always conscious of the ways in which the walls of the classroom threaten to hem in a stale air of unreality, and whenever possible I spur students to develop, extend, and test their insights in the broader world. When teaching political theory, I seek to relate big questions and themes to pressing issues and current events, whether those be a pending strike by a local union or a genocide taking place in full view of the world. When teaching comparative politics, I encourage students to extend analyses to countries in which they might have a specific interest. The culminating project of my Dirty and Dangerous Work seminar is an oral history in which students observe and interview workers involved in dirty or dangerous work and then relate their findings back to the major themes developed in the course. As I continue to learn and grow as a teacher, I view experiential and service learning as extremely promising areas for further exploration.

It is no accident that the word invitation figures prominently in this teaching statement. Ultimately, I believe teaching can be no more or less than an invitation to relationship. If genuinely self-motivated, lifelong learning is to take place, if students are to develop understandings and analyses of power, justice, equality, identity, and freedom that enable them to grow as critically informed and active citizens of their communities and the world, the choice about whether to accept the invitation must always remain theirs. As a teacher, it is my calling, my continuing adventure, to make that invitation to relationship as compelling, engaging, and persuasive as possible. There have been few moments in my professional life capable of approximating the fulfillment of having students respond to that invitation to relationship with a yes. This yes, for me, comes as

close to a visit from inspiration as it gets.

#### **4. Psychology sample**

As a teacher I strive to engage, challenge, and inspire growth in my students. It is my belief that every student is capable of tasting the passion that I feel for psychology by becoming collaborators in the exploration of psychological theory, research, and practice. To engage my students in the study of psychology, I begin by crafting stories that draw them into the thick of the learning experience. Behind every statistical technique, clinical intervention, and theoretical argument is a vivid anecdote, and I believe that it is my job, in part, to share these tales with my students. I prefer to teach through demonstrations: by conducting mini-experiments and analyzing data in the classroom, by participating in small group debates and role-plays, by observing and chronicling behaviors from the real world, and by discussing clinical case studies. I aim to immerse my students in the topics that I love. I believe that psychology, like a foreign language, is best learned by immersion in the context that led the researcher, teacher, or clinician to ask her question about the human mind.

To challenge and be challenged by my students is my second goal. I begin with the belief that every student possesses unique capabilities that can be shared with others if given the appropriate supports. I challenge my students to share opinions with and to mentor one another. I encourage brainstorming sessions, group projects, and group presentations. It is my hope that students leave my classroom knowing what it means to be a collaborator. I also expect to be challenged by my students; an expectation I hope to communicate to the class early on. I encourage my students to ask questions, and I am straightforward about not having all of the answers. When I become stuck I seek the input of my colleagues, my books, and the endless array of resources that can be found on the Internet. When I next return to the classroom, I share not only the answer that I've found, but also the process I went through to discover it. Above all else, I challenge my students to understand that I am open to their thoughts, eager to hear their opinions, and thrilled to learn with and through them.

Finally, I attempt to inspire growth in my students by giving them tools to take into other disciplines and into other domains of their life. Among these tools are a sense of curiosity, open-mindedness, and a thirst for knowledge. I would like my students to observe and begin to question the purpose and meaning of human thought, behavior, and emotions. After becoming skilled observers, I would like my students to use their tools to ask a few good questions, to creatively design a way of answering these questions, and to openly share their new knowledge with others. One of the beauties of psychology is its ability to translate across many disciplines and across many areas of life. Although my passion is for psychology in particular, one of the greatest goals I have is to teach my students to become motivated, insightful, and enthusiastic thinkers.

#### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

It is with great excitement that I look ahead to being a professor, given the experiences that I have had with teaching over the past six years. I have been fortunate enough to

be a teaching fellow in a number of courses beginning when I was an undergraduate at Stanford, and continuing during my time at Yale. In each of these courses, the professor offered me a great deal of autonomy to give a guest lecture and/or lead sections in addition to holding office hours, constructing exams, and grading papers. I have also had the opportunity to be a co-instructor in three courses: Social Psychology, Multivariate Statistics, and The Intelligent Emotions. Each course presented a wonderful opportunity to learn and to grow as a teacher. (Summaries of student evaluations of my instruction follow.)

I co-taught Social Psychology with another graduate student through Yales Summer Program. Among our students were Yale undergraduates, undergraduates from other universities, and advanced high school students. We designed the entire course and lectured, led discussions, and conducted demonstrations in every class. I learned a great deal about tailoring the pace and content of the material to the expertise and interests of the students, which was an exciting challenge given the diversity of the class. The Multivariate Statistics class that I co-taught was geared toward graduate students (with one or two talented undergraduates among the ranks). I worked closely with the professor, but gave a series of lectures over the course of the semester using many of my own materials. In this class, I learned how to make statistics fun, by appealing to the utility of the topic (for research and for better arguing a point in the real world) as well as by attempting to use compelling examples in each lecture. Finally, I co-taught The Intelligent Emotions on-line for Yale Alumni. This was an amazing experience, in that I had never before had the opportunity to use the World Wide Web as a classroom. The experience presented its own challenges (e.g., Can enthusiasm for a subject be adequately communicated over cyberspace?) and its own strengths (e.g., having students from across the country and the globe, of all ages and backgrounds, participate in the class). Intimately linking technological advances with classroom experiences is certain to become the norm, and I feel fortunate to have already gotten my feet wet in this teaching medium.

Another domain in which I have gained teaching experience over the past few years is as a clinical psychologist in training. I was given the unique opportunity to be the Assistant Director of the Yale Psychological Services Clinic in my fourth year of graduate school. In that role, I not only assisted in the Assessment and Clinical Practice course for first-year graduate students, I also supervised these students in conducting clinical work and writing intake reports. One student described in the year-end evaluation that I was a very sensitive supervisor who always made me feel my input was important. Another described, I cant think of anything in \*\*\*s supervisory repertoire that could be improved. I think that she should keep doing what she is doing. In commenting on my written feedback on write-ups of clinical interviews, he describes, Incredible! My previous supervisor was a journal editorgetting a report back from \*\*\* reminded me of working with him!\*\*\*s comments greatly improved the quality of my report, both in terms of content and writing style.

As an adjunct to my commitment to clinical training, my colleagues and I are working on writing a training manual for treatment planning, goal-setting, and assessment that will

be published by Guilford Press. A shortened version of our manual is now being used as part of Yale University's clinical training program. Currently, in my clinical internship at McLean Hospital, I am leading 9 different treatment groups (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy skills, depression and anxiety, body awareness, life transitions, goal setting, bipolar interpersonal issues) for individuals with severe anxiety, depression, and psychoses. Although these treatment groups are clearly therapeutic in nature, many of them are geared towards psychoeducation, which allows me to continue growing as a teacher as well as a clinician.

#### MENTORING GOALS AND EXPERIENCE

My desire to engage, challenge, and inspire growth in my students is not limited to the classroom. Over the time that I was at Yale I worked with over a dozen undergraduates as a research mentor and closely advised three students on their senior projects. My desire to collaborate with students translates into the research domain; two of my papers that are work in progress are co-authored with undergraduates. It is my goal to share with students the awe and excitement, as well as the dedication and hard work, that comes along with using psychological research tools to ask and answer questions. All three of the undergraduates that I advised went on to graduate school two are currently in education and one is a social psychologist in training (studying at the University of California at Berkeley).

Finally, it is critical to note that classes and workshops that feature pedagogical issues are a priority to me, and I hope to continue taking courses similar to those I have had at Yale (such as Peter Salovey's Teaching Undergraduate Psychology and Yale's Working at Teaching Seminar) in the future. I hold myself to the same standards that I hold my students. That is, I strive to become a skilled thinker and learner, and I believe that this process is life-long.

#### **5. Genomics sample**

As a teacher in the sciences, one of the most difficult goals is to get the students excited about science and technology. It transcends just ensuring that the course materials are sufficient and thought-provoking, or whether pedagogical delivery is clear and easy to follow. In the technology-enabled world of today, students are more plugged into the world. I believe by showing the students how scientific inquiry and knowledge can be used to help them relate to and navigate the world, the sciences can be made more accessible and, thus, appealing to the students.

A very powerful platform I have utilized recently is the introduction of my own DNA information in some of my lectures, where I taught students about concepts in genomics. My initial motivation was to demonstrate the high accessibility of knowing one's genetic data currently in the genomic revolution, with the hope of providing them the impetus to learn genetics (to interpret their own genes). The responses I garnered from the students exceeded my expectations: students not only asked more questions about the genetic concepts during class, but they tended to ask them in the context of interpreting a personalized DNA information. This strategy suggests that students can

be motivated to learn more about foreign concepts when they feel that they are more connected to or invested in the subject-matter.

A common observation I have also made over the years in my scientific teaching, be it pre- college students, undergraduate, graduate, medical students, or clinical and healthcare professionals, is the shared ability to grasp the general logic behind scientific concepts once a protocol has been clearly established at the appropriate level. However, very often what left students and/or trainees very frustrated, is the failure to apply what they have learnt to other scenarios, beyond the given examples. For example, in courses that introduce machine learning methods, I have taught a machine learning method known as principal components analysis (PCA) that stems from the field of mathematics and statistics. When I first started out teaching it to a group of undergraduates, the technical jargons were getting in the way of learning. Feedback from the students was that they were largely baffled by the unfamiliar use of variables, parameters and linear algebra concepts, even though there were guiding examples to show how the algorithms can be worked out. The ensuing attempts became increasingly fruitful when I contextualized my teaching to using examples based on more familiar applications that the students can relate to more readily, such as face recognition tools and DNA ancestry testing. It was definitely a boost in my teaching morale to see differences in student responses before and after a change in teaching approaches.

Despite having a myriad of teaching strategies that one can choose to engage the majority of the students, a teacher still has to be vigilant of the students that might get overlooked. Students come from a variety of backgrounds, personalities and interests. While I believe one does not have to individualize teaching within a classroom, I consider it important and useful to a teacher to be at least professionally engaged with their students in and out of classroom. A student once confronted me after my class and pointed out to me his dissatisfaction apropos of the way I managed the class that day. I had just handed them back their less-than-ideal quiz results, and had indicated to them, perhaps a tad too pointedly, that they can talk to me about how I can help them learn better in class. The student had perceived the comments as a direct affront to their intelligence, citing my tone and body language as inappropriate. Coincidentally, another student was waiting to talk to me and overheard the entire conversation. He came up after the first student left, and was encouraging, affirming that my comments in class, albeit sterner than usual, have been more than proper, even saying that I have been a great teacher and the reason he came to sections. This unforgettable encounter has been an inflection point in my teaching career, because it has been especially illuminating in presenting to me the different layers of actually understanding my students. On the surface, the incident demonstrated the wide-ranging differences in students' opinions. More deeply, it pointed to a lapse in my professionalism and a dearth of awareness for my students' sensitivities. The two students had, in turn, *taught* me, to be more mindful of the diversity in my class, both hidden and apparent, and to be more empathetic in my teaching.

Educating the next generation is a noble, and often challenging, cause. It goes beyond just ensuring that the students obtain good grades, memorize facts and figures and solve complicated math equations. Fundamentally, students have to be interested in learning per se. The teacher's job is as much a guide to knowledge as a motivator in learning. But because there is a heterogeneity of students exposed to an ever-changing world, a teacher has to constantly evolve and adapt his/her teaching strategies, in an iterative manner of introspection and student feedback. Only then, will we, as teachers, be able to engage students from the inside-out and teach them also that, they are invested in their own learning. My students have taught me a great deal and have motivated me to aspire to become a teacher they go to for knowledge and inspiration in learning. In turn, I hope to be able to share my thoughts and experiences with my students, and not just teach them, about the sciences and beyond.

## **6. Biology sample**

Recognizing that complex scientific topics such as climate change and stem cells are increasingly making their way into conversations and decision-making in daily life, one of my central goals as an educator is to promote scientific literacy among science majors and non-majors alike. Throughout my academic career, I have sought to foster science literacy through a variety of teaching opportunities as a graduate teaching fellow, instructor of a course that I designed, science education volunteer at area public schools, and research mentor in the laboratory. In each case, my approach as an educator has been to foster enthusiasm and interest in science and develop critical thinking skills in my students that will enable them to understand and appreciate science in the world around them. Cultivating an enthusiasm for science is an important element of establishing scientifically literate students with a lifelong interest in science. Whether my audience is undergraduate science majors or the New Haven middle school students I volunteered with through a science education outreach program, my approach to accomplish this is the same - I utilize a variety of teaching approaches to make the subject material as accessible as possible and provide opportunities for students to discover new ways of engaging scientific topics.

As a teaching fellow for an undergraduate cell biology course, I observed the spectrum of learning styles among students while teaching how ion channels and pumps facilitate an action potential traveling along a neuron. For some students the concepts and steps were clear after hearing them once in class, while others needed to see a diagram or draw it out for themselves to fully understand. However, there was still a subset of students who just couldn't put everything together. So, for the next class I prepared cardboard cutouts of  $K^+$  channels,  $Na^+$  channels,  $Na^+/K^+$  pumps, and  $Na^+/K^+$  ions, and enlisted students to act out the ion flux that enables an action potential to move along a nerve cell. The students enthusiastically participated in the demonstration and by then end of the class they had all mastered the mechanism of action potentials. I was so inspired by the success of this hands-on activity that I designed similar exercises for other challenging concepts like signal transduction pathways and G-protein cycling. The feedback that I received after the course was encouraging, and it underscored the

importance of making science understandable and exciting through a variety of teaching techniques:

*Honestly, this course would have been at least 3 times more difficult if John had not taken the time to make up interactive games and review sheets for our section. I am so thankful for the time and effort John put in as this enhanced my learning and enjoyment of the class tremendously. -Anonymous student evaluation, Cell Biology 205, Yale University, 2008*

Another approach that I employ to promote enthusiasm and interest in science is giving students ownership over the material that they are studying. As a research technician fresh out of college, I was overcome with joy after I developed a western blot, showed the result to the graduate student mentoring me, and heard him remark, "Congratulations, you are the first person to ever show that protein gets secreted!" The result itself was trivial and never led to any great scientific breakthroughs or advances, but the impact it had on me was undeniable -my work was important. When mentoring students in the laboratory, I assign them individualized projects that allow them to have that same degree of ownership over their work and pride when their effort leads to a result. While supervising the senior research project for an undergraduate student very interested in cancer biology, I devised a project to explore a novel function for a putative tumor suppressor gene not studied by anyone else in our lab. This project allowed her to become the "lab expert" on this gene, and her discoveries provided a new perspective on its role in cell cycle regulation. I also apply this approach to the classroom setting, where as a teaching fellows for an introductory biology lab course I assigned students mini-topics, including the steps in PCR or stages of zebrafish embryonic development, to research and present to the rest of the class as background on the subject we would be covering that week. These reports provided a starting point for further discussion and instruction, and created an opportunity for the student giving the report to be 'the authority' on the topic. By having ownership over the material they were learning, the students became much more invested, enthusiastic, and active participants in their own education.

In today's society, the public is exposed to science that is both more prevalent and more complex than in years past, which makes an understanding of how science is generated, communicated, comprehended and applied essential. As a science educator, I have encouraged students to enhance their science literacy through critical reflection and analysis of science in the world around them. For a writing assessment in an undergraduate non- majors course that I designed and taught called Science and Society, I asked students to identify a news story in the popular media, trace it back to a primary literature article, and write a paper describing the biological process being effected, the findings of the article, and how these findings were reported by the media story. This not only encouraged them to recognize science in the world around them through news reports about advances in renewable energy sources or protests over genetically modified crops, but it also pushed them to critically reflect on what they read and become more thoughtful consumers of information:

*Perhaps one of the most significant ways in which this class exceeded my expectations was in learning how to synthesize modern issue ideas and critically analyze them in order to effectively communicate my ideas. - Anonymous student evaluation, Science & Society, Yale University, 2010*

Additionally, as a teaching fellow in an undergraduate cell biology course, I strove to create an academic atmosphere that promoted critical thinking skills by staging in-class 'debates' on classic examples of competing models of biological processes, such as DNA replication and Golgi maturation. Under the debate format, each side presented an overview of their model, summarized supporting evidence from the literature, and designed a new experiment they felt would definitively show their model is correct. Most of the classic competing models being debated had long been resolved, however, the students often devised impressive, novel and creative approaches when presented with these problem-based challenges. The critical thinking and analytical skills that students develop through exercises such as these provide a solid foundation for their future as scientifically literate members of society.

My teaching philosophy and approach is an on-going process that involves constant refinement, adaptation, and modification to incorporate new information, skills, and pedagogical approaches. While at Yale, I have worked to develop my abilities as a teacher by participating in science education journal clubs, attending numerous teaching training and development workshops, and co-teaching a workshop on course design and teaching through the McDougal Graduate Teaching Center. I look forward to the opportunity to put these concepts into practice through the next step in my professional journey as a scientist educator.