3.4.1.2 Teaching Statements: Guidance and examples

As noted above, teaching statements or philosophies are often included in a teaching portfolio. However, they may also be requested as separate documents in the job application process and are usually about 2 pages in length.

If you would like to start writing one, here is a good explanation and some advice

These two examples were chosen for the differences in the way that past experienced was used; consider which example you find more effective and why. Example 1 models how PhD experience can be integrated.

Example 1. Frédo Durand

My main motivation for applying to a position in a university and not in industry is that I love teaching and interacting with students. I strongly believe in the importance of education in a society and teaching has provided me with my most rewarding professional experiences. The knowledge we accumulate as researchers and practitioners is valuable only if it is shared.
At MIT, I designed and taught a new multidisciplinary graduate class entitled *The Art and Science of Depiction*. I explored scientific and perceptual principles behind picture production, building upon computer graphics, art history, and perceptual sciences. The audience was composed of students from architecture, media art and science, computer science, and cognitive science. The class was particularly challenging because the material covered many fields, and because the students had very different backgrounds. The feedback was very positive, and in the future, I hope to introduce these elements in an advanced graphics class. My slides are on the web, http://gfx.lcs.mit.edu/~fredo/depiction.

During my PhD, I had the chance to do the full teaching of a freshman introductory class for two years. The course progression and lab session were following a curriculum common to the whole university, but each of us was fully responsible for a group of 30 students. The interaction with the students was great, and the size of the class was perfect to constantly monitor the students' understanding, and to look for alternative explanations when needed. In addition, I have been TA for a variety of classes including theoretical computer science, practical programming projects, and mathematics. In all cases, my research in computer graphics allowed me to attract students' attention and to anchor fundamental notions of computer science with examples drawn from their interests in games, movies, or simulation. As a part of my teaching duties, I attended each year 10 days of seminars and group work on teaching. The emphasis was not on ready-made solutions, but on the introduction and discussion of important teaching issues. More than the subject of the seminars, the most insightful parts were the discussions with peer young lecturers and the feedback from experienced professors. This is why I wish to return the favor, and be involved in similar programs. The goal is to provide TAs or young lecturer with a forum to discuss teaching in general, their experience, their ideas, and their fears.

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As a professor, I wish to teach computer graphics and the fundamental classes in computer science. A good education in computer science must rely on strong fundamentals in algorithms, data structure, numerical methods and complexity. My background in computational geometry has made me particularly aware of the need for solid foundation. Computational geometry requires strong fundamentals in algorithms and data-structures, and provides challenging problems as well as means to brush elements of research methodology. When tackling a computational geometry problem, the search is as important as the final proof. It requires the exploration of simple examples, the formulation of hypotheses, the invalidation of wrong solutions, and the generalization of intuition. I strongly believe that our experience in research is fundamental to assist students in learning to explore a problem when they have no intuition of its solution.

I hope to teach computer graphics, and rendering in particular. Besides the practical importance of the field, it is a great opportunity to teach and review fundamental techniques in mathematics and computer science. Rendering, for example, involves linear algebra, finite elements, integration and probability, geometry, wavelets and hierarchical approaches. The breadth of my research in computer graphics will help me develop and teach a comprehensive and well-illustrated course.

Example 2. University of Pennsylvania

My training at The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania provided excellent opportunities for me to develop my teaching philosophy. I functioned as teaching assistant for several undergraduate courses at the Annenberg School including, 'Communication and Persuasion,' instructed by Dr. Joseph Cappella, 'Children and Media,' instructed by Dr. Amy Jordan and 'Communication and Behavior,' instructed by Bruce Hardy. I also had the opportunity to teach 'Communication and Behavior' at the Annenberg School. I am strongly committed to excellence in teaching, as evidenced by my students' qualitative and quantitative evaluations of my performance in the classroom and by their nomination of me for the James D. Woods teaching award; an award which I was honored to receive.

I have the good fortune to have had extraordinary teachers throughout my education. I try to take what is exceptional about each of my mentors and apply it in my own classroom. The characteristics that impacted me most are those that I work hardest to replicate in my own classroom: enthusiasm for the material and strong critical thinking skills. I demonstrate and cultivate these characteristics by exhibiting a sincere interest in students' individual development, understanding their goals, unique situation and capabilities, and by holding high academic standards.

I try to cultivate an enthusiasm for the study of communication by illustrating my own enthusiasm for the material. I love what I do and I let that show in the classroom through the charismatic presentation of course material. In addition, I believe that an enthusiastic interest in the field starts with the sense that one has a contribution to make. I strongly encourage students to respectfully share their thoughts and questions in the classroom. To facilitate that exchange, I foster an environment where mutual respect is the norm. For my part, respect is communicated through my genuine interest in each student. I insist on knowing my students' names to show that I really do care what they have to say and that I see each of them as an

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individual with individual needs, goals and contributions to make both inside and outside of the classroom.

I also believe that students will be excited by what is most relevant to them. In order to know what is relevant, I must know something about my students. I encourage face-to- face meetings, at least twice during the semester. I also arrive early to class so that students have the opportunity to converse with me about who they are, where they are from, what they see in their future, what their interests are. I try to incorporate what I know about my students into lecture and discussion, primarily through examples. With reference to papers, I try to let the students sit in the driver's seat. I offer constructive criticism where necessary, while allowing the students to pursue what interests them. This way, I can push my students beyond what they are capable of accomplishing alone, while maintaining an investment in the subject matter. I also use the time before and after class to elicit feedback from students regarding what is and is not working for them in the classroom. I try to use that feedback to make adjustments accordingly.

I also want my students to learn how to think critically. That is, I want them to be able to make informed decisions about the merits of arguments that are presented and generate thoughtful feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of arguments as well as the theories, methods and evidence that are employed to support them. Therefore, I provide students with questions to think about while consuming a piece of literature so that their reading can be motivated and directed. These questions include: "What is the main claim in a particular study? What evidence is used to support that claim? Does the evidence that is offered indeed support the claim? Why or how? What other kinds of evidence could be used to support this claim? What are the implications of these findings?" These guiding questions also provide students with an opportunity to have focused in-depth discussion.

I understand that learning occurs when new information is integrated into existing knowledge structures and students vary in their baseline knowledge. Therefore, I offer a variety of learning tools for students such as a list of further readings that are not required, but offer different perspectives. I also try to connect new ideas that are presented with content from previous lectures.

I have high expectations in terms of academic standards. I help students meet those standards by encouraging and congratulating students when they understand the material and subsequently raising the level of discourse. In order to minimize the extent to which my high expectations work against my desire to cultivate an enthusiasm for the study of communication, I make my expectations clear from the first day of class. In addition, I am eager to provide extensive feedback on written assignments and I am available to meet for guidance. Although writing lengthy feedback on assignments is time consuming, I believe it is one of the most important pieces of feedback that we can provide students because it is tailored to the student's own interests and abilities. Consequently, it is an excellent opportunity to explain concepts in a way that make sense to the student. Finally, I account for progress that has been made. It is true that all students enter the classroom with different kinds of preparation and background knowledge. Assessment of the student's performance should take that into consideration. Student's progress should be recognized and I make an explicit attempt to do so.

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