

# Teaching Statements & Teaching the Interview Class

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**GTC** McDOUGAL GRADUATE  
TEACHING CENTER  
YALE UNIVERSITY  
[www.yale.edu/mcdougal/teaching](http://www.yale.edu/mcdougal/teaching)

# Outline

- Welcome and introduction
- On teaching
  - Statement of teaching philosophy
  - Talking about teaching
  - Teaching the interview class
- Resources at Yale
- Conclusions and questions



# Teaching and jobs

- 457 institutions responded to a survey addressing the importance of teaching for faculty searches
- 57% overall requested teaching statement
  - 50% for humanities and social sciences
  - 75% for natural sciences
- Conclusion: teaching statements matter!

Reference: Meizlish, D. & Kaplan, M. Valuing and evaluating teaching in academic hiring: A multi-disciplinary, cross-institutional study. *Journal of Higher Education*, in press

## The UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The Department of Neurobiology in collaboration with the new Neuroscience Institute seeks to recruit new tenure-track faculty. The search will target individuals studying cerebral cortex and/or CNS development. Interested persons should send their application to: (via regular mail)

**S. Murray Sherman, Chairman**  
**Department of Neurobiology**  
**The University of Chicago**  
**947 East 58th Street**  
**Chicago, IL 60637**

or via e-mail with attachments:  
[jdegroot@bsd.uchicago.edu](mailto:jdegroot@bsd.uchicago.edu)

The applications should include a cover letter, curriculum vitae, a statement of research objectives, and the names and contact information of three academic references. Applicants are also responsible for arranging to have the reference letters sent. Applications will be accepted until the positions are filled. Application review will begin **November 1, 2007**. *The University of Chicago is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer*

**From:** <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org> (accessed October 30, 2007)

## TENURE-TRACK VERTEBRATE PHYSIOLOGIST

### Department of Biology, Earlham College

We seek an individual that is **first and foremost excited about teaching** physiology, in lecture, laboratory, and research venues, to bright and motivated undergraduates in a nationally ranked department, at a small liberal arts college. **Teaching responsibilities include** a human physiology course(s), an upper-level specialty course, and contributions to team-taught introductory courses in cell physiology and genetics. A commitment to **collaborative student-faculty research**, and an ability to bridge our departmental strengths between cellular/molecular and whole organism biology are essential. Applicants who have an interest in one or more of the following are especially attractive: comparative physiology, anatomy, systems biology, use of omics tools. Ph.D. or equivalent required; **teaching or postdoctoral experience desirable**. Review of applications begins November 1, 2007. Send curriculum vitae, three letters of reference, and statements describing research interests and **teaching philosophy** to: Dr. Peter Blair, Department of Biology, Earlham College, Richmond, IN 47374. (Website: <http://www.earlham.edu/~biol/>) *Earlham College is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. We particularly encourage applications from women, racial minorities, and Quakers*

From: <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org> (accessed October 30, 2007)

# Teaching and related experience

- Teaching experience doesn't make you a good teacher.
- Experiences as a student, as an observer, as a mentor, and the like can be significant.
- Teaching experience is not just in the classroom.
- Practice dynamic reflection.

# Examples of relevant experience

- Peer tutor as undergrad
- TA in graduate school
- Mentor undergraduate in research lab
- Individual tutoring
- Taught a course
- Train others (technique, skill, software...)
- GTC workshops
  - Fundamentals course
  - Other workshops, events
- Observe lectures/labs
- Course/syllabus design (practice, or for real)
- **What else?**

# Teaching statement: general tips

- Be brief.
- Use specific examples.
- Be discipline-specific.
- Be yourself.
- Connect with your readers.
- Think of readers as future colleagues.



# Possible guiding questions

- **What are your goals as a teacher?\*\*\***
- What approaches and strategies do you employ in the classroom?
- What learning environment do you try to create?
- Qualities of an excellent teacher?
- Assessment – how do you gauge effectiveness?
- Why is teaching important to you?

## **DO:**

- Be positive
- Use specific examples, not vague generalities
- Prioritize
- Talk about students and content
- Address teaching/research interface
- Revise, get feedback

## **DON'T:**

- Recall negative experiences
- Apologize for lack of teaching experience
- Use an arrogant tone
- Use “should”
- Use a passive voice
- Over-generalize
- Ignore future growth as a teacher



# Sample to critique

- I believe that excellent teaching is achieved through reflection and practice, and that students learn best when they are engaged in the learning process.

# Improvements:

- In my experience, periodically soliciting feedback from students provides valuable insights about effectiveness of my teaching methods. In one section of...
- By assigning brief response papers, I ask students to critically analyze applications of nuclear radiation as well as speculate about its general relevance to society.

# Samples to critique

- When nonmajors take a chemistry course, they should learn to appreciate the breadth and power of chemical applications found in daily life.

# Improvements:

- When I teach nonmajors, I incorporate scientific data from popular media outlets (campaign speeches, health or environmental reports, etc.) with the goal of increasing student literacy in appropriate data manipulation and interpretation
- *“I was amazed to learn that chemistry really is everywhere, not just incomprehensible symbols and calculations in a textbook.”*

# A few current issues in teaching:

- Active learning
- Undergraduate research
- Engaging students
- Inquiry-based science
- Teaching to diverse groups



# Talking about teaching – the interview

- Addressing a lack of experience
  - Reflect on the experience you do have
  - Align your strengths with the position responsibilities
  - Have a plan for developing areas in which you'd like more training (resources? campus teaching and learning center? workshops?)

# General pointers



- Be honest
- Show enthusiasm
- Demonstrate sustained interest in the position
- Use concrete, specific examples
- Humility is a virtue
- Be willing to learn from current best practices
- Listen

# Good questions to ask

- What is the teaching load?
- How is teaching factored into tenure/promotion process?
- Perspective on scholarship of teaching and learning?
- Access to instructional technology (using ppt in the classroom, clickers, wireless)
- Tactic: bring up current teaching issue and ask how it is addressed by that department

# The interview class – questions to ask

- What should you teach?
- Setting: actual class, mock class, other?
- Who will be in the class?
- Related to likely teaching responsibilities?
- Student demographic?
- Media/presentation support?



# Pre-class preparation

- Practice (out loud, write it down)
- Practice for others – in and out of discipline
- If technology is involved, have a backup
- Handouts or activities – provide materials
- GTC consultation service

# Teaching-related experience for grad students & postdocs at Yale

- Fundamental and advanced teaching skills workshops, professional development programs
- Email [jennifer.frederick@yale.edu](mailto:jennifer.frederick@yale.edu) to sign up for weekly Teaching Notes announcements
- Transcript notation or certificate of completion awarded for participation in some series

# Fundamentals of Teaching in the Sciences

Offered Fall 2009 (science hill and med school)  
January 2010 (TBA)



Are you preparing to teach section for the first time? This engaging four-workshop series will help you learn how to lead a successful section for science courses and refine your skills as a Teaching Fellow. We will cover a host of topics essential for teaching in the sciences, such as: structuring your sections, effectively engaging students, providing and collecting useful feedback, and tips for grading efficiently and fairly. The workshops will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss strategies and approaches for issues common to science course sections. Armed with valuable ideas and knowledge of Yale's teaching resources, you'll be equipped for your first section and those to follow! For more information, email [jennifer.frederick@yale.edu](mailto:jennifer.frederick@yale.edu).



# Advanced Topics in Science Teaching

Next offered in Spring 2010

## •Sample topics:

- Scientific Teaching 101 – Course and Syllabus Design
- Presentation Skills and Lecture Writing
- Active Learning: Engaging Lectures and Lively Discussion
- Information and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science Class
- Writing and Other Tools to Promote Learning

# Contact information

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