Using and Writing a Teaching Narrative

A teaching narrative is a statement that addresses three key areas:

1) Philosophy of teaching and learning
2) Enactment of the philosophy through the use of specific examples of one’s teaching practices
3) Self assessment and critical evaluation of teaching practices

A teaching narrative is unique to each individual and should be a reflection of how that person sees her or himself as a teacher.

**Formative assessment and teaching narratives**

Teaching narratives can be used for formative purposes, in helping one improve one's teaching. In reflecting on one's philosophy and spelling out evidence as to how this philosophy gets implemented, a teacher can identify places where he or she is succeeding as well as areas where continued work is under way or needed. Furthermore, the narrative can serve as a guidepost for where one wants to take teaching as well as a reminder of where one currently is or previously was.

**Summative assessment and teaching narratives**

Teaching narratives can also be used for summative purposes in making decisions on tenure, promotion, and merit. In this way, teaching narratives need to provide evidence of one's teaching and to place this evidence in a larger context. This might mean linking examples to components of one's philosophy, describing the context of a particular course (e.g., it was the first time it was taught), or reflecting on idiosyncrasies in a course and course evaluations.

Goodyear and Allchin (1998) suggest that the narrative can help teachers clarify their vision and serve as a reminder for why they teach. In line with this, Brookfield (1990) urges that the teaching narrative "is crucial to our personal sanity and professional morale" (p. 256).

**What should a teaching narrative include, and how does one write one?**

As mentioned above a teaching narrative should include three elements: a philosophy of teaching and learning, concrete evidence for how this vision is enacted, and an assessment of one's teaching.

Listed below are some key points to consider in addressing these three content areas:

1) Philosophy of Teaching and Learning
   - What is the purpose of teaching and learning? Why do you teach?
   - What are your overarching learning goals for students?
   - What constitutes learning (e.g., based on Bloom’s taxonomy in terms of remembering, describing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, creating new knowledge)?
   - What is the role of the teacher and the student in your classes (e.g., is the teacher a “sage on the stage,” are students expected to be self-directed learners)?
   - What class organization and type of atmosphere do you think is most conducive to learning? Why? For what topic/class?
2) Enactment of Philosophy
   - What are the specific learning objectives and/or goals that you have for each class you teach and how are those tied into your philosophy?
   - What is your teaching style? How is this enacted in the various classes you teach (e.g., what are key pedagogies used in specific classes)?
   - What is the rationale for the type, frequency, scaffolding, etc. of particular assignments and assessment tools (e.g., exams) and how does it link with your teaching philosophy and specific learning outcomes?
   - In what ways are your methods linked to or informed by best practices either for teaching as a whole or for your specific discipline?
   - What are some examples of changes you have made to your classes over time, innovations you have introduced, and/or unique practices you implement in your classes?
   - How do your classes contribute to the larger goals of the department, the college, the university, and the discipline? Do they satisfy any special needs or requirements? For example, does the course you are discussing satisfy a core requirement, a requirement for the major, or a perquisite for other courses? Is the course one of multiple sections taught by different individuals? Does the course have a common syllabus? Is the course connected to a lab or to other components such as service learning or field work?

3) Assessment and Critical Evaluation
   - What evidence are you using to evaluate your teaching practices (e.g., student evaluations, peer observations) and to assess student learning (e.g., student performance on assignments/exams)?
   - Based on this evidence, what is working in your courses and what is not? For sections where there are relevant differences in pedagogy, assignments, assessment etc., do address those differences. In what ways have you addressed concerns?
   - How has your teaching, in general and for specific courses, changed over time? Are there changes or additions you have made to courses based on feedback or because you wanted to try something different or new?

A few specific reminders:
   1) There is not a singular way of constructing a teaching narrative; instead it should be a unique reflection of the individual.
   2) Teaching narratives should avoid generalizations and should instead provide specific, concrete examples.
   3) The narrative should be targeted for the correct audience.
      a. The narrative may vary depending on whether it is being used for summative or formative purposes.
      b. When writing a teaching narrative for an audience at LMU, it is crucial to remember the values embedded in the University’s Mission Statement and to also speak to them. Additionally, it is important to examine other statements on teaching that may guide the vision of one’s College and/or Department.
      c. Because teaching narratives are likely read by individuals from a range of disciplines, one should avoid the use of discipline specific jargon or explain it, if necessary.
   4) Teaching narratives are not just a recitation of facts; they provide context and analysis of those facts as well.
Resources:

Bibliography


This document was inspired by similar documents by the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Ohio State University and the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University