

# Teaching with Technology: Remediating the Teaching Philosophy Statement

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## Abstract

Teaching philosophy statements are ubiquitous at a particular moment in our intellectual and professional lives (i.e., the job search); we might, however, resituate them as living documents to multimediate, remediate, and use as a reflective space in our teaching careers. Although this particular genre is commonplace across disciplines in the Humanities, teaching philosophy statements are undertheorized, perhaps because they are typically situated in a particular moment. Because of the ubiquity of these documents, and also because of the lack of historicizing how they are prepared, how they are produced, and how they function—professionally and intellectually—in this manuscript we first provide a bit of background and context of teaching philosophy statements. We review the limited existing work on this important genre before we argue for why and how they might be attended to and rethought, especially in light of today's digital tools and multimediated ways of representing our work—and especially in the context of larger discussions about media work and professionalization. In the second section of this manuscript, we present examples from and reflect on our processes of remediating a specific type of teaching philosophy statement; we created teaching *with technology* philosophy statements, then remixed and remediating these traditionally prepared statements into slideshow presentations, Web sites, digital–visual collages, and digital movies. We describe the reflective and transformative work that can occur through such an activity by addressing four “emergencies” that occurred as we engaged this work. We conclude with comments about both the value of remediation and about the future of teaching philosophy statements in a multimediated world.

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... we redeploy the lore and paradigms that we have inherited—the advice, warnings, or ways of knowing that the authorities of print culture have given us—whether or not these are entirely appropriate for and ultimately beneficial to writing students of the twenty-first century (Westbrook, 2006, p. 459).

## 1. Introduction: Undertheorized, Underscrutinized, and Underutilized

Teaching philosophy statements are ubiquitous at a particular moment in our intellectual and professional lives—typically during the job-search process, as we complete our “terminal” degrees and seek full-time, ideally tenure-track, appointments. We would argue that although this particular genre is commonplace across disciplines in the Humanities, teaching philosophy statements are undertheorized. Very little attention has been paid to the teaching philosophy statement in terms of when they emerged, what they are, what they do, or even as a marker of a moment in

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our professional lives. Almost all of us were encouraged (if not required), as part of our professionalization, to prepare a teaching philosophy statement. Very few of us, however, have delved deeply into the emergence of the teaching philosophy statement; analyzed the ways in which we might see these documents as living, ongoing reflections of our praxis; or situated the ways in which remediation of these documents can provide space for reflection.

The majority of job ads for fixed-term or assistant professor positions in rhetoric and composition posted in fall of 2010 (those posted online on the MLA job information list, available through the *Council Chronicle*, and distributed via our professional e-mail lists) required a statement of teaching philosophy be included with initial application materials. Because so few documents are invited at this earliest part of the job search—typically a cover letter, curriculum vitae (CV), and the statement—these documents carry a good deal of professional weight. They are also a genre, and thus bring with them particular moves, conventions, and expectations. Typically, a teaching philosophy statement is a clear, concise account of the author's approaches to teaching, providing a sense of who the person is as a teacher and what s/he values. The statement discusses courses taught (typically in a narrative, reflective format rather than in the bullet-item style in the curriculum vitae), methods and/or approaches used in the classroom, and assessment practices integrated into teaching. A teaching philosophy statement typically does a bit of work in anchoring the author to a particular field and that field's practices, beliefs, and values. Teaching philosophy statements are not formal research documents *per se*, but they typically do include nods and shout-outs (often in parentheticals) to key theorists, researchers, and other teachers who have shaped the author's teacherly beliefs and values.

Because of the ubiquity of these documents, and also because of the lack of analysis about how they are prepared, how they are produced, and how they function—professionally and intellectually—in this manuscript we first provide a bit of background and context of teaching philosophy statements. We review the limited existing work on these documents before we argue for why and how they might be attended to and rethought, especially in light of today's digital tools and multimediated ways of representing our work. We then present examples from and reflect on our processes of remediating a specific type of teaching philosophy statement; we created teaching *with technology* philosophy statements, then remixed and remediating these traditionally prepared statements into slideshow presentations, Web sites, digital–visual collages, and digital movies. We conclude by reflecting on our experiences and providing some summary comments about both the value of remediation and about the future of teaching philosophy statements in a multimediated world.

### 1.1. Issues and complexities

In a 2003 article published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Gabriela Montell (2003a,b) interviewed individuals serving on hiring committees, and noted a range of complexities that orbit around teaching philosophy statements. One issue is that many job candidates feel lost while drafting a teaching philosophy statement; one reason for this is that most Ph.D.-earning individuals do their work at and graduate from research-focused institutions where teaching is one role among many, and cultivating an explicit philosophy of teaching may not have been included in their academic or professional preparation. This may seem odd to rhetoric and composition scholars, but a situation like this is fairly typical in the sciences, especially at research-extensive institutions. Another complexity is how the teaching philosophy statement is viewed. One of Montell's interviewees noted that hiring committees do not consider teaching philosophy statements “a deciding, or even serious, factor in the hiring process.” Another interviewee, however, contradicted this statement to argue about the importance of philosophy statements in situating applicants' teaching practices. Another layer of complexity has to do with the actual evaluation of a teaching philosophy statement, a genre for which little evaluative criteria exists. What constitutes a good teaching statement? What constitutes good teaching? Is a new Ph.D. well-situated to reflect upon and provide evidence of good teaching practices?<sup>1</sup>

Important to our manuscript, audience, and context are also orbiting issues in regard to teaching philosophy statements. Traditionally and historically, philosophy statements emerged and lived in ways similar to our classes: often, we find ourselves alone in a classroom, the door shut, in a somewhat isolated domain. Traditionally, teaching

<sup>1</sup> In fact, one of the early reviews we received regarding this manuscript stated that it was “premature” for graduate students with limited or little teaching experience to reflect on that limited experience. However, we situate teaching philosophy statements as process documents, and thus they require the negotiation of core values and evolving perspectives. We think that those new to teaching actually have a good deal to say about what they believe about teaching.

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