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Editorial: Supporting Aspiring and Early Career Faculty with Teaching Philosophy Statements in the College "Teach or Perish" Era

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This IJTL special issue highlights the gap in foundational training for faculty at two-and four-year colleges focused on undergraduate education (hereinafter referred to as *teaching institutions)* and explores the value of a new framework for writing Teaching Philosophy Statements (TPS). In this issue, TPS is used as an umbrella term encompassing *teaching philosophies* and *teaching statements* commonly cited in the literature. TPS is an expression of one's underlying beliefs, concepts and principles and a theory that guides an instructor's pedagogical decisions and actions. As described by Kristen Gregory and Amanda Burbage (2017), TPS represent "who one is as an educator, what his or her beliefs about teaching and learning are, and what his or her practice looks like in and out of the classroom" (p. 12). TPS provide vision rooted in one's core values and beliefs to purposefully guide instructional decisions and leadership.

Although the process of developing and communicating TPS may be challenging and vulnerable for aspiring and early career faculty, it is an important first step toward becoming a teacher leader. In this issue, a higher education teacher leader is defined as faculty who maintains classroom-based teaching responsibilities and influences their university/college community to improve teaching and learning practices leading to enhanced students' educational experiences and results. Since there is paucity of research on teacher leadership in higher education (Kinnunen et al., 2024), this definition draws from and extends TK-12 and teacher preparation teacher leadership research (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It encompasses both teaching and leading and differentiates a teacher leader from an administrative leader. Being a teacher leader influences personal, peer, and organizational pedagogical development, resulting in professional growth and improved outcomes.

A thoughtful, personal TPS serves as a beacon to guide one's academic career trajectory. It allows aspiring faculty to evaluate and apply for positions aligned with their core values and beliefs. Once hired, one's TPS reminds early career faculty to consistently align pedagogical decisions with their core values and beliefs and provides accountability to oneself, students, colleagues. Through the tenure and promotion process, revisiting, refining and sharing one's TPS supports professional growth and has the power to shape and transform culture within the college or university.

This special issue aims to support early career faculty with developing effective TPS so they can successfully enter and navigate college teaching institutions to become teacher leaders.

The editorial begins by briefly describing the US college faculty hiring process which often requires applicants to articulate their teaching philosophy and provide teaching demonstrations. Next, it explains factors that contributed to increased emphasis on college teaching and use of TPS for faculty hiring and promotion decisions. Amidst these backdrops, the editorial establishes the need for aspiring and early career college faculty to have foundational knowledge of teaching and learning. This knowledge facilitates the development of thoughtful TPS aligned with core values, theory and planned teaching methods, which better equips them for effective and responsive college teaching. The editorial continues by introducing a new TPS

framework with example TPS from authors that participated in a TPS writing community. It concludes with an epilogue proposing four recommendations for teaching institutions to support college faculty.

College Faculty Hiring

Full time tenure track college teaching positions in the United States are highly competitive. To attract diverse, qualified applicants, position announcements are made with professional organizations and national news sources such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education.* Historically, four-year universities have required doctoral degrees, whereas most community college positions require master's degrees and relevant certification and/or work experience (BLS, 2026). Applicants provide extensive dossiers per the institution's posted requirements with curriculum vitae, recommendation letters, and documents. When finalists are brought to campus, they are often asked to articulate their teaching philosophy and provide teaching demonstrations. These requests can be especially daunting for applicants with little or no teaching experience or foundational training.

Increased Emphasis on College Teaching and TPS

Traditionally, the sole prerequisites for college teaching were graduate degrees and research trajectories. While "publish or perish" remains a central mission of US Research I and II institutions, "teach or perish" has become a central mission of colleges focused on undergraduate education (Ahn, 2018; Carnegie, 2025). Community colleges, in particular, need effective teachers, since they hold teaching as their central mission. Community college faculty spend 89% of their time teaching compared with 63% of time by 4-year college faculty (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Additionally, the population of community college students continues to grow. Nearly 40% of US undergraduate students enroll in community colleges (AACC, *2025*). Their increasingly diverse student population spans dual-enrolled high school students to students seeking associate and baccalaureate degrees (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2025).

During the 1980s – 1990s tuition hikes and public scrutiny increased emphasis on college teaching. The public needed to see that tuition was, indeed, paying for quality teaching. In response, seminal research was conducted that ultimately transformed teaching from being seen as an easy, private and vocational act to being seen as a complex, public and professional act. For instance, Lee Shulman (1987) highlighted the intersection between content knowledge ("the what" of teaching) and pedagogical knowledge ("the how" of teaching) into the specialized pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Expert teachers use PCK to effectively adapt disciplinary topics for diverse learners over time. As research on effective teaching ensued, college faculty centers moved from individual faculty development (e.g., supporting disciplinary expertise and research, providing basic teaching skills training, remedying low course evaluation scores) to community teaching and learning (e.g., centers supporting pedagogy, learning outcomes, and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning [SoTL; Boyer,1990]). Likewise, college teaching began shifting from faculty delivering content (e.g., lecturing, modeling) and students passively receiving content (e.g., observing and memorizing) to more faculty facilitating active, experiential learning experiences to support diverse students. Alongside these shifts, hiring committees adopted TPS as a means to gain insight into applicants' beliefs and pedagogical

approaches to gauge alignment with values and potential for success in the new "teach or perish" era (Brown, et al., 2014).

Need for Foundational Knowledge

With increased focus on teaching and more diverse student populations (NCES, 2024), there is a critical need for college faculty to acquire foundational knowledge of teaching and learning. In PK-12 education, preservice teachers go through extensive preparation programs before they can start teaching. Yet, most college faculty begin teaching with limited or no teacher training. In his book on the history of college teaching in America, Jonathan Zimmerman (2020) states:

> When it comes to teaching, we're solo operators, we're flying by the seat of our pants. We're amateurs. That doesn't mean we teach badly, because sometimes amateurs can teach really well. What it means is we don't have a codified understanding of "good" and "bad" in the first place (Preface section, para.4).

It is common for new faculty to enter the classroom with idealistic visions and expectations and face significant challenges when confronted with the realities and complexities of teaching (Colclasure et al., 2021). Many rely on "teach how you were taught" or trial and error approaches, which often do not transfer and can lead to unfavorable outcomes, including student dissatisfaction, poor course evaluations, faculty stress, and attrition (Alexander, et al., 2012). However, pedagogical preparation can prevent or mediate these effects (Pike, Bradley & Mansfield, 1997).

Based on this reality and research demonstrating teachers have the largest effect on student achievement, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) recommended that all teachers have foundational knowledge so they understand learners, learning, and pedagogy. They explain theory provides the foundation for effective teaching bridging the gap between students and content. By connecting theory with "reflective practice" (i.e., thinking on one's feet during teaching and analyzing and improving after teaching; Schön,1983) faculty can develop adaptive expertise, defined as the ability to apply knowledge and skills flexibly to novel problems and situations (Bransford et al., 2000). This expertise equips them to move beyond traditional, rigid, teacher directed approaches to respond to diverse, changing, complex classroom contexts. Developing one's TPS provides an important opportunity for aspiring and early career college faculty to acquire foundational knowledge to inform and enhance their teaching.

TPS Framework for Early Career College Faculty

While there is a plethora of publications and online resources for writing TPS, most provide general writing and formatting guidelines (e.g., write for your disciplinary audience, use first person, and aim for one to two pages), content suggestions (e.g., include your goals, values/beliefs and teaching), and tips (e.g., provide concrete examples and describe and explain what you do and why you do it). A few noteworthy articles discussed below address the need for foundational knowledge setting the stage for this special issue.

Nancy Chism's (1998) seminal article offered formatting guidelines and TPS components and conveyed the need for foundational knowledge. She pointed out faculty struggle writing TPS

because "most have not studied the literature on college student learning and development nor learned a vocabulary to describe their thinking" (p. 3-4). She suggested dialoguing with colleagues and seeking examples to help develop one's TPS. Yeom et al. (2018) presented a 4-step writing process model and alluded to the importance of aligning beliefs, theories and practice. In addition, Taff (2023) more explicitly discussed the importance of underlying theories and philosophies informing one's TPS. He explained literature can assist authors with connecting their beliefs to their methods of teaching. Thus, the framework presented in this special issue addresses the needs and recommendations set forth by these authors.

New TPS Framework

This special issue advances the field of college teaching by presenting a new coherent guiding framework to write TPS, followed by three examples written by current and past graduate students. The first article written by Ruth Ahn illustrates a new TPS framework to help prospective and early career faculty write coherent TPS. This simple framework focuses on one's core values/beliefs which provide the foundation for select learning theory(ies) and teaching methods. Consistent with recommendations by Chism (1998), Yeom et al. (2018) and Taff (2023), the new framework provides a succinct and coherent direction to write TPS: Methods, Theories, & Values (MTV).

After the first article, three example TPS are provided by Amy Hua (chemistry), Jane Rumpak (biology) and Marissa Escobar (mathematics). The selected authors participated in an emerging teaching professionals' academy to gain foundational knowledge to support their roles as graduate teaching assistants (TAs) or part-time faculty. After learning about the TPS framework and completing the academy, the authors joined a professional writing community facilitated by the editors to develop their TPS. Their statements are presented in order from most to least experienced author. Amy Hua, a part time chemistry instructor for a 4-year university and community college, presents accessibility, collaborative agency, and intellectual empowerment as core values and constructivism as her primary theory. Jane Rumpak, a current graduate TA and tutor, presents social interaction, inquiry, and guided participation as core values and sociocultural theory as her primary theory. Finally, Marissa Escobar**,** a math tutor provides psychological safety, community, confidence, and metacognitive awareness as core values and social constructivism as her primary theory.

The special issue concludes with an epilogue that reflects on what we learned from leading the year-long writing community. We highly suggest for readers to visit the epilogue since it includes insights and recommendations that were not included in the editorial. Our goal for this special issue is to embark readers on a reflective TPS development and/or refinement journey that equips them to successfully enter college teaching, adapt to change, become teacher leaders, and earn tenure and promotion. Most importantly, we desire for faculty to identify and maintain unwavering commitment to their core values and beliefs so college teaching remains personally and professionally enriching.

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