

Writing a Reflective Teaching Statement: Six Words to Guide You

In the current climate of hiring in Humanities, the odds are never in your favour. The most recent position for which we hired at my university received 160 applications of which very few were automatically unsuitable, judging from their CVs alone. Given these raw numbers, a carefully crafted teaching statement can play a significant part in making a candidate appealing to an overwhelmed search committee. Every institution has its own values, and this talk is shaped by the perspective of a member of a small public liberal arts Classics department. That said, my suggestions aim to be valuable for applications to other types of institution as well. The advice offered here can be summed up in six words to shape or influence your teaching statement: time; truth; imagination; experience; reflection; and enthusiasm.

Time is needed to find out as much as possible about the department to which you are applying, and truth, to ask yourself honestly whether this is a place which could make you happy and which you could make happy. Imagination comes next: what particular contribution can you imagine making to the department, both in what it already does and in what it could do? Experience should underlie the imagination: specific examples of what you have already taught and your approach to it are essential, and, at least for small departments which typically yearn after energetic generalists, an appealing teaching statement contains both breadth and depth – breadth of expertise and depth of reflection on what your particular strengths as a teacher are, and also areas in which you have become, or are becoming a better teacher. Lastly – enthusiasm, which leads us back to time and truth. The candidates whose teaching statement seemed to engage genuinely with the types of teaching, - undergraduate research, for example - that my department values highly, through having taken the time to explore our website and get some

sense of the “flavour” of the department were the 20 candidates whom we put at the top of our lists and whom we were excited to meet in person.