

### STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY (Graduate Assistant Teaching)

As a student, I was fortunate to be taught by amazing teachers who showed me how a passion for their subject, enthusiastic encouragement of students' active learning and a respect for human diversity can engage students to learn creatively and independently. I believe that living and learning are inextricable, and a well-taught course can influence the students' choice of future career, lifestyle and, consequently, life path. Therefore, I take to heart the part that I play in the lives of my students, working hard to ensure that their learning experience is as fulfilling as can be.

The University of Calgary has given me the chance to be a truly versatile teacher: I have taught seven language courses and six tutorials in French, Russian and German and worked with instructors from different units of the Faculty of Arts as a Learning Technologies Coach.

Following the example of the teachers who inspired me and drawing upon my own teaching experience, I attach particular importance to **(1) student-centered learning, (2) empathy and inclusivity, and (3) responsible teaching and learning.**

First, I believe that learning, in general, and language learning, in particular, should be organized as an engaging interactive process, in which students construct knowledge together with their peers and with the instructor. As a language teacher, I think everything in the world is interconnected, and language study links students to many areas of human social life. Therefore, I strive to use language as both an instrument and an object of study, revealing important links between multilingualism, personal and societal benefits and linguistic tolerance.

Second, I am absolutely convinced that effective learning can only occur in an inclusive relaxed space conducive to natural exchanges between students and the teacher. Therefore, in my classes, I always do my best to create an atmosphere of friendliness and collaboration, where learners with diverse talents and needs can develop their abilities and uncover their potential.

Third, I work diligently to organize my teaching in a disciplined and clear manner, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning and to engage in critical self-reflection on their progress. I like to raise the students' awareness that their learning success does not entirely depend on the instructor but can only be ensured through their own active participation in the learning process.

### SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

In this section, I present three strategies I have developed for each of the beliefs I hold about teaching.

*Student-centered learning.* First, in my language classes and tutorials, I incorporate activities **developing students' linguistic skills (e.g. reading, vocabulary, speaking) into active learning about the target culture.** For example, in FREN 209 (Beginners' French) and 211 (Intermediate French I), the students watched films and compared French and Canadian cinema. Through class discussions, I encourage students to reflect on differences and similarities between their own culture and that of the target language, making sure to highlight the wealth of world culture. This increases the students' intercultural sensitivity, tolerance and empathy.

Next, I **encourage student collaboration** by assigning particular topics that students review in groups to prepare for tests. They then share the most important points of the revised material with other groups of students. This way, the course material is broken into manageable chunks, ensuring that students are not overwhelmed with their review thereof. Collaboration also helps students to overcome certain individual difficulties, which they would otherwise be struggling with in isolation.

Third, I make the **best use of classroom space and technical possibilities.** For example, in my RUSS 301 class, I was given the opportunity to teach at Taylor Institute, where multiple screens,

whiteboards and spacious classroom enabled me to assign different complementary activities to several groups of students simultaneously, capitalizing on their diverse abilities.

*Empathy and inclusivity.* In my various classrooms, I work hard to adopt a personalized **inclusive approach to different groups of students** in order to cater for their individual needs. For instance, in the two Russian classes (RUSS 331 and RUSS 333) I taught, I had to reconcile heritage speakers, whose families speak Russian at home, and new language learners, which I handled by mixing different types of students for group work and assigning them different roles. To increase the course effectiveness, I also created my own supplementary learning materials catering to the needs of different groups of students and held discussions with fellow instructors on how to improve the curriculum.

Furthermore, as I strongly believe that students' mental health and learning success are connected, I sometimes make exceptions to rules set in course outlines in order to **adapt to unexpected classroom situations**. For example, once I saw a deeply upset student bravely show up for a test because she did not have a documented reason to justify her absence. I let her leave the classroom and write the test a week later without penalty. That student never missed a test again and was very diligent throughout the semester.

Also, when working with struggling students, I always talk about my own difficulties as a beginning learner to **reassure the students that their difficulties are surmountable** and can be overcome with effective learning strategies and direction of efforts, which we discuss individually during my office hours. This is also the strategy that I used when working as a Technology Coach with instructors confused with educational technologies. I felt that the first thing to do was to put them at ease by reassuring them that software applications can be challenging for technology specialists, as well.

*Responsible teaching and learning.* At the beginning of each tutorial or course, I clearly present my expectations to the students, describe myself as a teacher and invite the students to reflect on what kind of learners they are and what they may do to succeed in my course. I think the **alignment of instructor's and students' expectations** empowers the students, increasing their chances of success.

Furthermore, I like to **involve students in their own assessment** by creating checklists and rubrics in the first person for presentations and class participation (e.g. "I actively participate in class discussions. Assign a value of 1-5 to this statement"). I ask students to go over them at the beginning and at the end of the course or before and after presentations to put themselves in the instructors' shoes when assessing their work.

Finally, when teaching a French Translation Workshop which prepares graduate students for the second language requirement exam (translation from French into English), I assigned as homework excerpts of articles highlighting the studied grammar and vocabulary, which students needed to translate on their own. I always provided them with detailed feedback on their work in individual emails. In class, I went over the most common recurring mistakes in aggregate. This **enabled the students to work independently** and later learn what could be improved. Similarly, when working as a Learning Technology Coach, I felt that my task was not just to solve the instructors' technical problems but also to explain to them how to find solutions on their own should the problem arise again. This increased their independence and confidence with new technologies.