Sample Statement of Teaching Philosophy: Computer Science

[Please note that hyperlinks were included to refer to other sections or artifacts in the teaching dossier.]

As an educator, be it as a head teaching assistant or an instructor, I carry a set of lived experiences with poverty, disability, negative racialization and mental health challenges that inform a fundamental belief: all students, regardless of their circumstances or the socio-economic adversity they face on a regular basis, have the right to accessible and equitable education. What is unique about me is an outward recognition that my lived experiences are not unique and that they are in fact shared by many of my students and affect them in very similar ways. I start each semester with a presentation that shares my lived experiences, for better or worse, so that I can lead by example in creating an environment of shared empathy, understanding, and relationality.

Moreover, I view my students holistically and consider their academic, professional and personal needs so that they are empowered to succeed in the same ways I was. This, in turn, guides my pedagogy, from course design to delivery, such that I aim to eliminate the invisible barriers and challenges I overcame that my student still faces. This approach manifests itself through a direct commitment to wide-ranging, trust-based accommodations in our syllabus and engaging wellness activities in tutorials that serve to improve mental wellbeing - a determining factor for a student's academic to which I dedicate considerable time to better understanding through training. As a community organizer, I always consider how my resources and experiences can be leveraged to empower my communities and positively affect those around me. I view my classrooms as a platform where we can empower students to succeed and improve our societies as a result of that success. In developing a community-engaged learning program where students work directly with non-profits, community organizations, researchers, civil services and social impact ventures, my students gain valuable experience by deploying meaningful software solutions for pressing societal issues. They are able to apply their learnings in real-world contexts, further enriching their understanding of the material and developing the skills necessary to succeed professionally.

As a result of this approach, my greatest challenge is creating an environment with the necessary flexible conditions for students to succeed while recognizing that many of their holistic needs lay well beyond the confines of the classroom. This, however, is also my greatest strength in that I lead by example in developing and executing flexible support aspects of the course that can rapidly respond to these needs while recognizing our own logistical limitations. In the spirit of trust and understanding, I succeeded in developing open extenuating circumstances policies that allow them to complete their academic work on their terms when they are facing personal adversity. In the spirit of flexibility, I successfully advocated for the heavy use of TA time towards tutorials and office hours, to create opportunities for targeted and specific learnings. In respecting students' need for choice and autonomy, I've accepted and presented a diversity of community partners and developed clear but open rubric expectations so students are enabled to realize their

professional ambitions and learning goals through our course. While I cannot control their circumstances outside the classroom, I have meaningfully committed myself to social justice work that aims to address the societal challenges in equitable access to education. From establishing an emergency food bank at UTSG, to serving on the Student Advisory Committee for Accessibility Services, to being elected as the Undergraduate Steward for CUPE3902 or as an incoming board member for APUS, I am directly engaging with issues of poverty, accessibility, and equity as they affect my students, fellow student educators, and myself.

To succeed in Computer Science, one must learn to become adept at solving domain-specific problems and be able to rapidly fail often. Whether it is designing complex algorithms to simulate and improve hospital emergency room workflows or building applications to redivert surplus food to after school learning programs, experience is paramount in developing the skills to do so pragmatically. These skills are refined through practice, failure, and eventually success, often through professional experience. Our community-engaged learning program creates real but safe opportunities for students to engage with such problems. However, in a course setting, it is necessary to assess the performance of students fairly without stifling creativity. Our project deliverables and rubrics, in tandem with open tutorials and office hours, carefully balance expectation-setting with challenging opportunities to demonstrate excellence and critical thinking. Moreover, our communicated expectations acknowledge the reality that many solutions can exist for any one problem, without limit or prescription from myself and my fellow educators. As supportive as our program is, our students grow exponentially through the positive discomfort stemming from being challenged in a real-world environment: making decisions under ambiguous/uncertain circumstances, engaging with stakeholders that have limited interactions with software engineering students, operating with limited resources, taking decisions based on risk vs. reward, making mistakes with consequences, reflecting critically on their performance, and subsequent correction with guidance and feedback.

My model for effective or good teaching is reflected by Professor Ryan DeCaire who has been a teacher, colleague, and friend to me over the last few years. Ryan exemplified the notion that effective teaching involves broadening our considerations beyond the classroom and acknowledging the incredibly varying walks of life of our students. Moreover, he taught me to embrace how students engage with concepts differently and that courses can be structured to be inherently flexible and react to the learning needs of our students without sacrificing academic rigour and excellent learning outcomes. This model inspired me to realize the value of embracing my identity as a student in enacting my aforementioned fundamental belief: all students, regardless of their circumstances or the socio-economic adversity they face on a regular basis, have the right to accessible and equitable education.