Bryant Teaching Statement

As an Assistant Professor at Trent University and (previously) as a Graduate Teaching Fellow at Brooklyn College, I have taught a range of undergraduate courses – from large-scale introductory courses to small-scale upper-division courses. During my time in the classroom, I have developed into an approachable, clear, communicative, and effective educator. Among my top priorities is student engagement. This statement will discuss some of the strategies I've developed for promoting active, engaged student learning.

Getting Students to Speak Up

First, I recognize that discussion is integral to active student learning and I promote it in several ways. Where students can generate some point on their own, I pose questions to draw it out of them, rather than flatly stating it. I also pause frequently to ask for questions and to provide students with points of re-engagement — for instance, by summarizing the discussion so far or by saying something attention-grabbing, like 'A good exam question about this would be ...' Moreover, when a student raises a question, I often step back and encourage other students to answer it. In larger classes, I regularly break students into small groups for discussion. In seminar-style classes, I have students orally present and lead discussion on materials from the syllabus.

Presentation Tactics

When I present material, I use a number of tactics to maintain student attention and interest. First, I attend to the performative dimension of teaching — I move about the room, gesture, and modulate the tone of my voice. Moreover, I frequently use thought experiments and imaginative examples to make abstract ideas more concrete and easily grasped. I also deliberately provoke students by defending silly or extreme positions, so that their frustration compels them to defend their own views. Further, I regularly use class polls, which get students to take sides and, for those whose attention has drifted, to wake up and re-engage. For instance, after covering the problem of induction, I ask my students whether they know the sun will rise tomorrow. Or for another example, after studying skepticism and G.E. Moore's defence of common sense, I ask students whether we should take skepticism seriously or respond with Moore's flat-footedness. Of course, whichever side students take, I encourage them to explain and defend themselves.

Integrating Technology

I also integrate technology and media into my classes in several ways. For larger courses, I use slides as a visual draw and include eye-catching images to add interest, spark the imagination, and aid memory. Sometimes I integrate relevant YouTube videos to illustrate arguments and ideas. Moreover, in many classes, I require online discussion of the assigned readings prior to each class. This prepares students to more readily absorb and contribute to in-person discussion. Compared to comprehension quizes, I find online discussion to be more interactive, less consumptive of class-time, and better at generating critical thought.

Engagement for All

When I say I aim to promote student engagement, I mean the engagement of all my students. That is, I aim to promote an inclusive classroom. I do this in several ways. First, I create a warm, friendly, and respectful atmosphere, in which all students can feel welcome and encouraged to contribute. I also balance discussion so that no one voice or group of voices dominates, but rather all voices (including underrepresented voices) are recognized. I also work diligently, together with the appropriate office of the university, to meet the needs of students who require special accomodations and to ensure that they have every opportunity to succeed in their univeristy careers.

Writing to Learn

Writing is a central avenue through which students engage with and respond to course content. As a Writing Fellow in CUNY's Writing Across the Curriculum program, I received training in writing pedagogy, where I learned the importance of *scaffolding* assignments (breaking them in to small incremental stages) and of integrating low-stakes writing into the classroom. I worked one-on-one with students on concision, clarity and precision, syntax, structure, and flow. I taught grammar sessions, developed resource materials for students, and researched learning outcomes. These experiences have prepared me to make writing a particularly effective instrument of learning.

In sum, as a result of my significant teaching experience and pedagogical training, I have developed several strategies for promoting active student learning. I look forward to developing these strategies further as my career advances.