INTRODUCTION

Let’s be brutally honest: I began by writing my personal statement this time around by copying-and-pasting my statement from third-year review. I suspect many of my colleagues start the same way. However, this backfired on me. After reading my statement, I realized that I would have to rewrite the entire document because I have changed so much in just a few short years. I think these changes have been for the better. Hopefully you agree after reading my statement.

TEACHING

I believe there are three components to creating an environment of effective teaching and learning. First, there must be mutual respect between the teacher and the students and among the students. Second, active learning techniques should be used to engage students so that they are active participants in the learning process. Finally, establishing curricula that develops liberal arts skills will help to prepare students for their life beyond their undergraduate experience.

I work very hard in my teaching, and I set high standards for my students. Fortunately, Colgate students are able to respond to my demands because they are intelligent and (usually) willing to learn. However, those attributes do not guarantee effective learning. I have found that if there is mutual respect between the students and me, the students work harder because they do not want to disappoint me. I think this was nicely captured in a quote from my student: I “create an environment where you (the student) want to do well for fear of disappointing.” My students seem to be engaged in the subject matter and want to show me that they are interested. As a result, they are producing high quality work, and they seem to be getting a lot out of my courses.

How do I get students to respect me? There are many ways, but I have found that respecting their ideas, opinions and concerns goes a long way toward gaining their respect. I also show my respect for their efforts and abilities, which is especially important when students are struggling so that they do not get overwhelmed and give up. I demonstrate my willingness to help them reach my high standards in office hours, by providing them quick feedback on graded work, and by offering numerous examples and practice problems. In recent years, I have become more confident and firm with my students, and show them just how hard I work by discussing my research projects with them. As a result, my students better understand my job as a teacher-scholar and the multiple demands on my time.

I have discovered that students learn more when they are directly involved in the process of learning. Active learning takes many forms, but I regularly use a combination of in-class activities, group work, debates, discussions, presentations and experiments in my courses. One of my favorite active learning techniques is the think-pair-share. Students first think about the topic independently, then talk about their ideas with a partner, and lastly share their ideas with the class.

I have found that active learning fosters a classroom environment were students feel comfortable to discuss, debate, and ask questions. My students are more willing to take risks in

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1 Many of my active learning techniques come from my participation in a workshop, “Teaching Innovation Program,” co-sponsored by the American Economic Association and the National Science Foundation.
the classroom when they are engaged in the learning process because they feel that their opinions matter. Active learning creates a safe learning environment where students respect one another. In this safe environment, students who have a difficult time participating in class are more likely to become involved. An important outcome of active learning is that students take responsibility for some of the course material. My students realize (early in the semester) that they are jeopardizing both their grade and their classmates respect if they come to class unprepared. The active learning exercises are meant to motivate students to share in the responsibilities of teaching and learning.

Realistically, most of my students are not going to remember the intrinsic details of a macroeconomics model five years from now. However, I can help my students develop the liberal arts skills that they will need to be successful in whatever their future endeavors. If students understand the importance of these skills, they are more patient with my methods, knowing that I am trying to help them achieve their personal goals.

In the development of liberal arts skills, my curricula focus on writing, reading, thinking, presenting and discussing. This, of course, involves active learning techniques. My students are required to combine their verbal and written skills with quantitative and theoretical techniques to carefully analyze economic issues. I try to foster a classroom environment where there is mutual respect so that students learn how to discuss issues and differences in a civil way. I ask my students to critique one another, in an effort to learn from each other. Students also gain an understanding of real-world issues by applying their analytical skills to complex social phenomena.

I know that I am a better teacher today than I was six years ago. Much of this improvement can be attributed to my students, colleagues and participation in several teaching workshops. In each course I teach, I try to foster mutual respect between myself and my students through the use active learning techniques that focus on the development of liberal arts skills.

CONCLUSION

The big picture of being a professor, researcher and contributor to students’ lives is so much clearer to me now. Somehow I landed the perfect job for me. Okay, so I copied and pasted a few sentences here and there. But, 97 percent of this document is original. Amazingly, it was much easier this time around. Why? Because today I have a much better sense of who I am as a teacher, scholar and active member of this university.

I guess that’s why this profession, and this job, is so great… it is constantly evolving. My teaching, my research and even my service contributions have changed in the last six years, and Colgate has been supportive of this evolution. I have been fortunate to be a part of this prestigious institution. It has been the ideal job for me; a rare but almost perfect blend of teaching, research and service that is not replicated at any other institution of higher education in the world. I have enjoyed being a spokeswoman for Colgate, whether it has been at academic conferences, with alums or with prospective students and faculty. I look forward to continuing to be an integral part of the Colgate community in the future.