James Newlin
Teaching Statement

To prepare the students of my British literature survey for a unit on adaptations of *Hamlet*, I lecture on the basic techniques of film production and analysis. After class, one of my students approached me and jokingly complained, "You've ruined movies for me! Now I can't just sit and watch anything without thinking about the shot length or camera angles!" With each of my classes, I aim to "ruin" the act of reading in this way, disrupting my students' instincts to "just sit" passively with the text. As an instructor, I focus on enriching these skills of interpretative reading and critical inquiry through a student-centered, dialogic pedagogy.

One effective way of initiating a vibrant dialogue between students is to subtract my own voice from the discussion. In a Renaissance drama course, I will offer a simply worded prompt—i.e. "Is Marlowe's *Edward II* homophobic?" "Is *King Lear* a religious play?"—set a kitchen timer, and remain silent until the alarm rings. At first, students are overwhelmed by a need to fill the silence, but as they respond to one another without any expectation of their instructor's approval, they gradually explore unexpected connections between the course readings and their own ideological or aesthetic expectations. I can then refer to their specific comments later in class discussion, as examples of potential topics for further exploration in research projects.

Group projects enable collaborative dialogue between students. For example, I dedicate a class session to an impromptu debate tournament, providing small groups of students with differing thesis statements, and giving them half the class period to prepare competing presentations. In a survey of British literature, I might ask my class to consider the influence of texts read earlier in the semester—*Everyman*, Chaucer, Malory—on *The Faerie Queene*. I require one group of students to argue that Spenser's epic is fundamentally derivative, while asking another to argue that it is fundamentally original. The exercise is a variation of Peter Elbow's "believing game." Students briefly convince themselves, as well as their classmates, of a point with which they may not agree. This prepares them for the engagement with diverse viewpoints in formal research projects, while also introducing them to the conventions of academic presentations.

My academic research frequently engages psychoanalysis, and my teaching is informed by my understanding of clinical dialogue. The analyst will frequently shift the model of the session to encourage the revelation of repressed material, and introducing variations in the classroom similarly encourages breakthroughs. I therefore assign projects in a variety of modes, so that my students adopt both formal and unconventional, creative approaches to the class material. For example, my upper-level renaissance course holds a day-long "Milton Marathon." Students read *Paradise Lost* aloud, in its entirety, while simultaneously presenting interpretations of the poem with costumed performances and multimedia presentations. They then prepare formal essays clarifying those choices. By considering the same reading in multiple modes, my students' initial, creative responses develop into a more evaluative, more engaged understanding of the text. (Not to mention, the event helps encourage the love of Milton across campus!).

Both teaching and psychoanalysis involve close listening for what Shoshana Felman calls "unmeant knowledge" – the flashes of insight that, through the steps of interpretation, may lead to profound critical statements. By encouraging students to debate their own responses, as well as those of their classmates, I communicate a sense of the dialogic process of academic inquiry.