

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The first economics course I took changed my life. I was floundering in my search for a major and a career. Economics offered an appealing blend of mathematical rigor and policy relevance. By the end of the term, I had decided that I wanted to be an economist. I recognize that over the course of my teaching career, I am unlikely to convince many students that they, too, want to be economists. However, I hope that all of my students gain an idea of what it is that economists do, that they retain some enthusiasm for and interest in what economists are doing, and that they have a sense of how it applies to their own lives.

One of the primary goals I have in teaching is to help students understand the methods economists use to analyze problems. At the most basic level, this involves understanding how and why models are used. Any model is a simplification of a complex, real-world situation. I will teach my students that models can be powerful tools, but that the results can depend critically on the simplifying assumptions of a model. At another level, I want students to realize that many of the methods used by economists center on marginal decision-making. In an introductory course, this insight should be realized as students apply the supply and demand model to a variety of situations. In a more advanced course, this might be realized by recognizing that the interaction of utility-maximizing agents is a common feature across models.

My second goal for student learning is for students to develop specific problem-solving tools. Unlike the methods of analysis discussed above, these tools are more specific to the level and content of a particular course. For example, a principles course should familiarize students with graphical analysis of comparative statics. How are the goals of acquainting students with methods and tools related? Understanding the methods of economics will allow a student to approach an unfamiliar problem from an economist's point of view, and set up a structure for analyzing that problem. Understanding the tools of economics will allow a student to carry out that analysis.

Finally, a major goal of mine is to have students perceive economics as an exciting and powerful field. In advanced classes, this will involve incorporating ideas at the fore front of the research frontier. Intermediate classes, I hope to achieve this goal by incorporating some accessible professional articles. In an introductory class, I have asked students to find newspaper articles that make conclusions contradictory to predictions we've discussed in class, and to analyze why the article might include a mistake or oversight.

I try to create an inclusive learning environment by being easily accessible to students and open to communication with them. When asked an unexpected question in class, I'm willing to pause for a few minutes to think before answering. If I cannot give a thorough response at that time, I return to that question at the beginning of the next class. By doing so, I hope to send students that message that I value methods and viewpoints that differ from the ones I come prepared to discuss.

I do a fair amount of traditional lecturing, but make an effort to organize and present material in a variety of ways. Diagrams are used frequently in economics classes. I like to supplement these with numbered lists of the steps involved in their construction. I also tend to write a lot of verbal descriptions on the board. At times I worry that this slows the pace of the class too much, but I have been repeatedly assured by students that this is not a problem. I also try to make connections between various topics within each course and to other courses. I find it particularly rewarding when

students themselves point out connections between course content and other areas. After studying monopoly price discrimination, one student told me that he had suggested a re-design of the membership fee structure for his student organization. I have found active learning techniques to be highly effective during office hours, with groups of three to ten students. In these situations I regularly send students to the board to work on problems, or redirect one student's question to another student. As I continue to develop as a teacher, I would like to find ways of incorporating elements of active learning into larger classes.

Finally, I feel that the most important means of implementing the goals I have for students is to teach with enthusiasm. Luckily, this has been easy for me. I feel immersed in my field and truly enjoy it. Students see this in the energy and commitment I bring to teaching. I hope that these traits help students to retain an appreciation for the methods, tools, and ideas they have learned in the class long after the class is over.