

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Knowledge can not only inspire people but can also transform the quality of their lives. When, as in the case of Economics, the knowledge is fundamental and can be applied to a wide array of significant problems and issues, its impact is dramatic and far-reaching. This is why I love to teach Economics. Educating students on how to effectively allocate limited resources and manage tradeoffs so as to create optimal human outcomes is both highly productive and personally satisfying. I enjoy conducting research in such a fascinating and valuable discipline and conveying its many insights and methods to students. My goal is to provide students with the ability to understand the rationale that underlies choices and outcomes, whether at the individual or global levels, while also helping to prepare them to become successful individuals, workers, and citizens.

To maximize student interest and attention, I like to begin every new topic with a lot of motivation. Given the vast reach of Economics, there are usually many important and engaging issues, problems, or examples to choose from. In the classes I have taught, this typically involved an example of a business decision or policy implementation. For example, after characterizing a specific scenario, I invited students to put themselves into the shoes of the decision maker and asked them to formulate and defend an optimal strategy by using the ideas and methods they were learning in class. I encouraged alternative proposed solutions and sometimes even conducted a vote to determine the level of consensus. Often, the proposed answers would not be unique and this generated a lot of useful and lively discussion. In such activities, my attempt is to direct students to facts relevant to their lives or professions in a manner that highlights the value of the insights and methods of Economic analysis. In the “end”, students learn to appreciate the role of incentives, constraints, etc., in reaching a productive outcome. This process becomes even more intriguing in the context of health care where so many pressing issues have been unsolved and controversial.

Of course, reaching the “end”, after the problem is framed and properly motivated, requires the learning of concepts and analytical methods that create value. This is where the organization of the class, selection and presentation of topics, etc., plays a huge role. Here, my teaching style, following my educational background from China, places much emphasis on a clear and complete exposition of the theory, starting with the assumptions,

the development of a model and the derivation of the results. In this process, I enjoy providing meaningful economic meaning to the assumptions while sometimes demonstrating the fragile nature of such with interesting counterexamples. This entire process also has the huge benefit of enhancing students' critical thinking skills. But it is the building of models and the rigorous derivation of results that, while very challenging, is an indispensable part of developing sound reasoning. Still, much of this can be great fun. It gives me satisfaction and enjoyment, for example, to make transparent which assumptions lead to which conclusions. In doing so, students start to appreciate that there are logical and well-defined processes that create outcomes and things do not just magically occur.

In terms of operational specifics, I organize my lectures by asking questions and creating conversations. Students are encouraged to dig deep into problems, to identify tradeoffs, and to attempt to determine any unintended consequences of possible solutions. I invite students from different locations in the classroom to participate so that the discussion is not confined to a particular group. Sometimes, creating an atmosphere of competition has encouraged students to make contributions. I have often given some extra credit points to active participants or discussion "winner". Students should recognize that they are capable of enhancing the production of knowledge and understanding it is productive to reward their efforts. Another way to stimulate student participation and learning is to present examples that are familiar to them. Students are more inclined to focus more sharply and to share their views and insights when they are more comfortable with the content.

To determine students' mastery of the subject matter, I utilize a combination of in-class quizzes, take-home exercises, and exams. All of these testing tools focus on understanding and problem solving and not on memorization. I also require students to write short articles on current issues in Economics and Business. Students are asked to select a current article and analyze its arguments with the knowledge they have acquired in class. This exercise requires students to open their eyes to the world and, using fundamental instruments, build a bridge between the real world and Economic analysis. As indicated previously, real applications of knowledge stimulate interest in the subject matter more than anything else.

The limited but valuable teaching experience I have had at Arizona and Tulane allows me to look at Economics from a different perspective. While research in Economics often requires a very deep understanding of a narrow area, teaching Economics effectively entails a broad and coherent presentation of knowledge. Teaching benefits from repeated depictions of the big picture and a roadmap of where things are going. Along these lines, I enjoy introducing my course topics systematically. At each transition between important sections, I like to recall the flowchart that describes the outline of the entire course. This not only reminds the students of the overall landscape of the subject but also demonstrates the logic and important interconnections. This is the beauty and value of Economics. I am committed to delivering this gift of beautiful and practical knowledge to many future generations of students.