

Teaching Philosophy

Having a significant experience of being a student myself and likewise as a course instructor, I realized the crucial role that teachers play, not only in educating their students but moreso in preparing them for the next chapters of their lives. My extensive experience in teaching all levels of students at the University of Illinois at Chicago – from undergraduate *Macroeconomics* to PhD-level *Econometrics* – allowed me to develop different effective approaches in teaching students of varying degrees of capability and levels of exposure to the material. I am currently teaching *Behavioral Economics* to advanced undergraduate students, and I am taking advantage of my several years of teaching experience to make it the most exciting Economics course they'd have undertaken. These various and varied teaching experiences have cemented my desire to work at an institution that puts premium in the value of quality and effective delivery of education services.

My teaching philosophy has 5 major components:

1. Making the learning environment engaging through different simulation and classroom activities
2. Making the material “accessible” to students
3. Teaching students other skills in addition to content (e.g., writing skills, studying techniques)
4. Ensuring transparency in learning goals and emphasizing fairness in course requirements
5. Forming personal connections with students

Engaging classroom learning

I learned early on that teaching through the use of powerpoint presentations alone is not very effective, especially when teachers seem to be having a monologue the entire time. The challenge is to maintain not only students' attention in class, but also their interest in the material overall. In my current *Behavioral Economics* class, for instance, I utilize classroom surveys and experiments to make them realize whether the class conforms to the findings in experimental economics research. They are particularly more engaged when I make them play games using the “Moblab” app (Mobile Laboratory) where I could illustrate how markets reach equilibrium, how they make their own preferences for altruism and fairness, or how they learn to update their beliefs like a true Bayesian will. I have also asked them to conduct field experiments so they can have a first-hand experience in testing the rationality of people under different circumstances. In these kinds of activities, I ensure that I conduct careful debriefing to clarify my students' learning and to confirm if the learning objectives are met. When I served as a discussion teaching assistant for undergraduate *Macroeconomics* and *Econometrics*, I learned that the best way to make students learn the material is through several classroom exercises or examples, which use situations familiar to them. For instance, I illustrate how regression discontinuity design (RDD) yields causal estimates of Latin honors on earnings by making them realize that students who just exceeded the GPA cutoff to get a Latin honor is very similar to students who almost made it. I emphasize that comparing the labor force outcomes, for example, between these groups of students using RDD will help distinguish between the causal effect of honors and of unobservables correlated with obtaining honors. When I conducted my weekly discussion sessions on graduate-level econometrics, I usually prepared several exercise problems and I wrote the proofs or solutions step-by-step. The best way to ensure students do not get lost in the lengthy mathematical proofs is to regularly ask them the logic for certain lines of proofs or to ask them what sort of theorems permit certain manipulations. Overall, the skillsets and the teaching approaches I used to keep students engaged were wide ranging as the difficulty of the courses I taught also varied incredibly.

“Accessible” material

Students, they be undergraduate or graduate, tend to get intimidated by mathematical equations and Greek letters. When I present materials which seem highly technical, I ensure that I am not only clear in explaining what each symbol mean, but more importantly, I stress what the intuition behind the expression is or what it implies in layman’s terms. For instance, when I illustrated what the rate of time preference (ρ) signifies in an intertemporal model, I stress that this term is really nothing but a representation of how much people value a sip of water now vs after 30 minutes when they are thirsty. To illustrate the bias-variance trade-off, I usually draw dartboards because it helps students imagine what it means to have unbiased or efficient estimators. I also tend to use examples from current events or typical moments on campus to illustrate concepts. For instance, to illustrate possible cycling of preferences, I use voter preference between and among Clinton, Sanders, and Trump. In another instance, I illustrated the concept of opportunity cost by asking what they think are the opportunity costs of staying in an unfulfilling relationship, or going to college, or pursuing a degree that their parents want but they don’t. In all my classes, I emphasize active dialogue. I regularly ask students if they have any questions, emphasizing that there are no stupid questions, and that it’s better to sound stupid for a minute than to be one for the rest of their lives.

Non-content Skills

I see my role not only as an Economics teacher, but as an educator. I believe that as teachers, we should help our students succeed in the academe, first and foremost, but more importantly, in life. For instance, I have asked my undergraduate students to make critical reviews of key papers in the *Behavioral Economics* literature partly to introduce them to the current state of research in that field. It is also my way of making them familiar on how professional economists conduct and write research papers, enhancing their critical thinking in the process. This exercise also hopefully improves both their reading and writing skills as professional economists in the future. In my comments of their critical reviews, I tend to comment not only on their economic analysis or logic, but also on their grammar and writing style. In addition, I have required them to present their findings from their field experiments in class to improve their presentation skills. I have also introduced the use of Latex, noting the rising popularity of this typesetting system among economists. In one way or another, my course requirements have underlying learning goals that are not necessarily related to the course content.

Transparency and Fairness

One thing I realized as a student is that I like to be on the same page as the professor, in the sense that I know exactly what his expectations are, and I have a clear sense of what the learning goals of the course requirements are. I practice this kind of expectation setting in my classes. Particularly in my *Behavioral Economics* class, I require my students to do a wide array of activities – from writing critical reviews to conducting field experiments and presenting their research in class. For every course requirement, I tell my class what exactly the learning goals are. I emphasize that the critical thinking and other skills that they will be able to develop or enhance through my course requirements would benefit them in the long run. I tend to stress that from my experience as a former central bank economist, excellent reading, writing, and presentation/speaking skills, or even soft skills would come in handy in their future careers. I also tell them that I have carefully thought about how much time they should devote to fulfilling my course requirements, making sure that these are not excessive. In the end, my hope is that students would see the requirements as fair and are actually worth spending their time on.

Personal connections

I want my students to have a sense of community in our class so I try to develop a friendly learning environment. I exert effort to remember my students’ names in the first week of classes. I tend to use

their names in my hypothetical examples to make them feel more involved in class discussions. I also ask about their future career goals and current interests so I could make my examples more interesting to them. I typically share my learning strategies and time-management skills, reminding them that I was once in their shoes not too long ago. In addition, I encourage them to talk to me after class or during office hours or send me an email if anything is unclear or if there are other things they wanted my help on. Overall, my goal is for them to realize that I am there to help them learn and prepare them to be excellent economists in the future.

Final Note

I believe that underlying a successful teaching role is a continuous process of learning, re-learning, or even unlearning. While teachers are there to educate students, teachers can also learn a lot from students in one way or another. I take the view that teachers should nurture the inquisitive mind of students and at the same time, prepare them to tackle challenges in the next chapter of their lives. Teaching is fun and satisfying – intellectually and emotionally – especially if teachers are able to make learning worth the while of students.