

### Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As an economics educator, I believe that my first and most important job is to instill a sense of wonder for our discipline. To me, this means illustrating to students how the economic way of thinking can increase their understanding of the world around them, improve their own personal and professional decision making, and foster their ability to make informed decisions about policy issues that are most important to them.

To evoke this wonder, I always try to tie economic concepts to practical topics of interest to students. When working with students in one-on-one or small group settings, I am able to determine these interests on an individual level. When working in a larger classroom setting, I solicit topics of interest and incorporate the most broadly popular topics into my lectures. For instance, when teaching the course *Economics of Current Issues in the United States*, we discussed the economics underpinning cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin, crowdfunding services such as Kickstarter and IndieGoGo, and student debt. These lectures gave rise to lively debates and illustrated the broad applicability of economics. A particularly satisfying outcome of this approach came during the class discussion of cryptocurrency. A student familiar with the topic (and a bitcoin owner) offered to give an after class demonstration of how the deep web works. I was extremely pleased that our discussion sparked enough interest to entice about half the students to stay an extra 30 minutes after class. I have found that applying economics to topics that most interest students is one of the most effective methods to evoke a sense of wonder about the explanatory power of economics. This approach also increases students' receptivity to learning about how economics applies to more "traditional" topics such as taxes and spending, inequality, and trade.

I believe it is important to recognize that, outside of an economics classroom, most students will never need to explicitly set up and solve a constrained optimization problem. However, developing the ability to think like an economist—thinking at the margin, thinking in terms of incentives, and thinking in terms of tradeoffs—is an invaluable skill in any profession, and life generally. Thus, in my class, I stress the development of strong economic intuition, which involves forcing students to be able to express themselves in words as well as mathematically and graphically.

One of my favorite approaches to helping students build economic intuition relies on using many and diverse examples of an economic phenomena, tying these examples together into a general framework, and then asking students to apply the general framework to other specific examples that relate to their own lives. On one memorable occasion, I explained to a group of students that the price a monopolist sets for a good depends, in part, on the elasticity of demand for that good. When I asked the students to relate this principle to their own experience, one student's face lit up and exclaimed, "That's why Wendy's reversed their decision to remove the Jr. Bacon Cheeseburger from the 99 cents menu!" Though the example may seem silly, it was enlightening to this particular student and helped him better understand a more general economics concept. Indeed, the student later informed me that he recalled our "Jr. Bacon Cheeseburger" discussion during one of the questions on his midterm exam.

While building economic intuition is the most important skill that most students take with them from an economics course, I also believe that it is important for students to become comfortable with the mechanics of solving economic models. Indeed, as the level of the course increases, comfort must transform into mastery. One reason setting up and solving models is important is that it reinforces and often clarifies intuition. Another reason is that it builds general problem solving skills. Finally,

proficiency with the mechanics prepares students for further coursework and lays the foundation for the few students who will become the next generation of professional economists.

In my experience most students have the best chance at achieving proficiency through repetition and “overlearning”. Thus, my approach to teaching the mechanics of economics involves solving, in detail several problems on the blackboard and then assigning many similar problems as the first exercises on each homework set. By assigning many simple problems at the outset, students gain confidence and mechanical proficiency which improves their ability to deal with more comprehensive—and tricky—homework problems.

Helping develop a sense of our discipline's limits is an often overlooked responsibility that I believe I owe my students. There is no doubt that the economic way of thinking and the formal models that we teach are very powerful tools to understand the world around us. However, they have limits and are usually based on very strong, and often implicit, assumptions about rationality and information. Unfortunately, some students who first become enamored with the power of economics begin to take models literally, and often apply them where they do not belong—for instance, always assuming perfect competition. I know this, because, for a short while, I was one of these students. I have known many others over the years. Given time and attention constraints, this is not a topic that I dwell upon, but it is a topic about which I try to make my students aware.

While my primary goals as a teacher involve ensuring that my students receive a top-quality education, I also enjoy getting to know my students and interacting with them on a personal and professional level. I often stay after class to discuss economic issues and learn about the career ambitions of my students. Indeed, these discussions lead one of my top students to ask me to write her a letter of recommendation for masters programs, which she ended up attending in London.

Though I have a deep passion for economic research, it is difficult to beat the happiness and pride I feel when I am able to help my students achieve their personal and professional goals, observe their economic intuition and critical thinking skills develop over the course of a semester, or watch them experience one of those “ah-ha!” moments that so often occur in economics. Indeed, these events inspire me to always strive to become a better teacher and mentor to my students.