Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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I entered college with the intention of pursuing a science degree in preparation for medical school. However, as I sat in my first economics course as an undergraduate at Yale University, I became fascinated by economic theory and the clear framework that it provided in the analysis of choices and incentives prevailing in the global markets and institutions. In my research, I am still inspired by real-life puzzles and policy-relevant problems, and in my teaching, I want to help my students discover how even the simplest economic theory can clarify and strengthen their understanding of the world.

At the University of Houston and at Boston University, I served as the instructor for the following courses: introductory microeconomics, an upper-level undergraduate course on poverty and discrimination in the U.S, and a Ph.D.-level course in labor economics. I have come to value the following principles in my teaching experience, and these ideas will continue to guide me in the future.

1. **Understanding the backgrounds of students**: Understanding students’ technical backgrounds as well as their academic interests is extremely important in establishing the right goals and expectations, in selecting supplementary course material, and in determining the appropriate level of instruction. For the beginning of each course, I create a short survey for my students with questions about their math and economics background, majors/minors, reasons for enrolling in the course, and what they hope to learn. From their responses, I have often found that many students do not have the right technical background despite fulfilling the prerequisites or their expectations for the course do not align with my own goals. When there is a great mismatch in the objectives of the students and the teacher, the course can often alienate some students and quickly forfeit their attention and effort. Throughout the semester, I try to remain flexible in my teaching style and focus to meet the changing needs and interests of my students.

2. **Relatable concepts and examples**: Conveying the relevance of the coursework to the students’ personal experiences, current events, and policy debates is an important part of helping them to learn the material and engaging them in the classroom. Although I do not shy away from introducing complex mathematical concepts when necessary, I always provide real-life motivations for the model and try to explain the model’s implications in terms to which the students can easily relate. In my lectures, I also introduce newspaper/magazine articles and even videoclips that are pertinent to the topic at hand and encourage my students to present relevant material in the classroom. Finally, I create assignments that address current events. For example, in my poverty and discrimination class, I assigned a paper asking students to evaluate the poverty and welfare policies proposed by the two presidential candidates. In my course evaluations, many students commented on the positive experience they had working on the paper. They appreciated the opportunity to critically examine policies that they had simply accepted or dismissed before the course.

3. **Consistent expectations**: I believe that consistency in expectations across lectures, assignments, and exams is extremely valuable. Students should be able to identify the most important course topics from their emphasis in lectures and assignments. Assignments should foreshadow the content and difficulty of the exams, and expectations about what is a correct and complete answer should be comparable across them. While I believe that it is necessary to challenge students with new types of questions that test their thorough understanding of the course material, weak connections between lectures and exams can often frustrate students and demotivate them.
4. **Promoting a thorough understanding**: I have often found that students who are able to solve for an equilibrium mathematically are not able to explain the basic intuitions of the model. For others, the opposite holds. In my assignments and exams, I ask a variety of questions – both mathematical and short answers/essays – to encourage a more complete mastery of the course material and to provide different types of students with opportunities to demonstrate their level of understanding.

5. **Availability in and outside of the classroom**: It is very important to me that my students know that their questions and comments are valued both in and outside of the classroom. This starts with being approachable, remembering students’ names, actively soliciting questions throughout the lecture, and responding to emails quickly. I also make a point to stay for a few minutes after each lecture to speak to students and to answer any remaining questions. Most students are reticent to speak up during lectures, especially in a large classroom setting. I try to encourage the use of office hours by frequently reminding them of the time/location, holding extra office hours before exams, and personally urging struggling students to seek help early.

6. **Introducing undergraduates to real economic research**: As an undergraduate, my most memorable lectures were classes in which my professors shared freely about their own research. I believe that an important part of getting students interested in the coursework is introducing them to current economic research and the creative ways in which economists approach these questions.

7. **Importance of humility**: As a student, I have come to value the importance of humility in a teacher, and I have been very fortunate to have had great examples of professors who reflect that quality in their teaching and interactions with students. This starts with recognizing one’s own strengths and weaknesses, being open to feedbacks, treating students with respect and professionalism, and not being afraid to admit your lack of knowledge about a particular topic. When students ask questions in class that I cannot answer, I make an effort to remember the question, look up or work out an answer after class, and respond in the next lecture or through an email. In my classes, I also try to be honest about the shortcomings and caveats of the models and research I am presenting, and as much as possible, allow my students to form their personal opinions about the validity of these studies instead of demanding their adherence to my own interpretations.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my teaching experiences, and I am looking forward to continuing to improve as an instructor in the university. In the past five years, several of my former students have chosen to pursue graduate work in economics or public policy, and I am thankful to have been a part of their decision-making process. Their enthusiasm for the subject motivates me in my own research and helps me remain passionate about teaching.