

Teaching Statement

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Real-world application is at the core of my commitment to excellence in education. My goal is for students to not only retain but to apply economic knowledge to everyday decisions. For that reason, my broad experience as an educator combines both the practical and theoretical aspects of economics. Having taught or tutored students of all ages and university levels, in both business school and economics department environments, I have found that adaptability, along with enthusiasm, patience, and an emphasis on metacognitive skills, are vital in helping students convert abstract economic concepts into useful, practical tools. In what follows, I describe how each of these four elements supports that goal.

Adaptability

Studies indicate that students put forth more effort and perform better academically when they perceive value in the subject matter and feel confident in their ability to learn.¹ In my experience as a student and educator, the same conditions encourage application of knowledge outside the classroom, and they can be actively influenced by an instructor who is willing to adapt to students' needs. In practice, I try to adapt content to enhance the value of my courses, while adapting the style and pace of instruction to build student confidence.

When modifying content to add value, it helps to know what students want to learn. During summer 2013, I taught two modules designed to acquaint new graduate students with computer software for empirical analysis in economics. After a few sessions, I asked students to complete a short survey providing feedback on the content and pace of the course. The survey also asked students to suggest topics they'd like to have covered that were not on the syllabus, and I was able to incorporate several suggestions into later lessons. Another way I have adapted course content is with something I called a "Challenge Day." For the same two modules, I designated one class session as a Challenge Day, during which I would tackle difficulties faced by my students in their research. I solicited challenges one week in advance, selected those that allowed me to teach relevant concepts, and prepared solutions and an explanation to cover in class.

With regard to teaching style, adaptability means finding an approach that works. As a teaching assistant for *Global Managerial Economics*, I had the pleasure of guiding seasoned executives in acquiring fundamental analytical tools of production, pricing, and game theory. Many students were already successfully managing global, multi-million dollar organizations, so the applicability of these concepts was paramount. In explaining cost minimization, I began with a graphical approach, which failed to connect with the students. I found that talking through examples in the context of a student's field of expertise had an immediate impact on his or her understanding. Since students learn in a variety of ways, versatility in teaching style necessitates preparing lessons that cater to multiple learning styles. For example, in preparing content on multi-sided platforms for *Fundamentals of Business Economics*, I addressed visual learners with diagrams and graphs; auditory learners with lecture and class discussion; reading learners with relevant online business articles (e.g. *WSJ* and *NY Times*); and tactile learners with an interactive, in-class game designed to demonstrate the power of network effects.

I also believe the pace of a course should be adaptable, and I strive to teach at a speed that is challenging, but not overwhelming. To hone in on the optimal pace, I ask questions during lecture at the end of each section. When working through examples in class, I also pause to confirm understanding after every major step. However, struggling students are often hesitant to speak up during class. I combat this problem in three ways. First, I

¹ For an overview, see Pintrich, Paul R. (1999). "The Role of Motivation in Promoting and Sustaining Self-Regulated Learning," *International Journal of Educational Research* 31: 459-470.

schedule at least one break during class, providing students an opportunity to convey their concerns to me or catch up on their own. Second, I give them the chance to express their concerns anonymously, and at their own convenience, using the aforementioned class survey. Third, I make myself highly accessible to students. In addition to in-person meetings before and after class or during office hours, I am available over the phone and via Skype. As a teaching assistant for *Global Managerial Economics*, I regularly provided help to students well past 10:00 P.M. At their request, I also coordinated an online review session using Cisco WebEx software, which allowed the entire class to participate remotely via computer or telephone, from countries around the world.

Enthusiasm

Studies of effectiveness in higher education commonly find that an instructor's enthusiasm predicts positive learning outcomes.² As both a student and an educator, I have seen the impact that enthusiastic instruction can make. Passion for the subject can enliven a mundane lecture, encourage student interaction, and attract attention that might otherwise have been diverted to newspapers and smart phones. I strive to bring the excitement I feel about economics into every teaching situation. Evaluations from students reflect my commitment in this regard. Enthusiasm is consistently among my highest ratings.

Patience

Learning is a process, and some students can take much longer than others to assimilate economic concepts. To prevent students from getting discouraged requires respectful patience, especially in the face of frustration. Moreover, patience goes hand-in-hand with adaptability. For every effective example or approach, several others will inevitably fail. Eventual success often requires a patient, modest attitude. In educating others, I try to validate every level of comprehension, treating every question and struggle as a legitimate effort at understanding. I find that this approach engenders student respect and encourages class participation, especially among business-oriented students. My teaching evaluations indicate the value of this quality and my success in demonstrating it.

Emphasis on Metacognitive Skills

As an Undergraduate Teaching Intern at Indiana University, I learned that the most crucial element in transforming passive learners into active problem solvers is a focus on metacognitive skills. In my teaching, therefore, I stress the *process* of thinking as well as the outcome. This approach plants ideas more firmly than recitation alone and aids students in applying what they have learned. As one student in *Fundamentals of Business Economics* remarked,

"You really helped me understand the class clearer. I like the way that you asked us why we thought that our idea was correct (even though it was wrong!) and explained the right way of thinking later."

Assessing how students think about a concept is necessarily difficult. The comment above illustrates one of my techniques, which is to ask students how they arrive at their answers to in-class questions. Another method I have used is direct observation, whereby I ask students to, "Think out loud for me," as they solve problems on the board. I find that students respond favorably when I challenge them to take responsibility for both their thinking and their learning, as evidenced by the comments of another business economics student:

"I thought I would sit back and be a passive member of the [review] session but Joe called us each up to the front so that we could demonstrate our knowledge of the concepts we originally got wrong. I learned so much from that session... just because Joe made us responsible for what we got out of the review."

In summary, my goal as an economics educator is to equip students to absorb and apply economic concepts in their everyday lives. In pursuit of that goal, I aim to adapt the content, style, and pace of my instruction to suit students' needs, always maintaining an enthusiastic and patient attitude, with a focus on both the process and outcome of learning. I am committed to providing the most excellent and effective instruction possible, and I look forward to many more years of learning and improvement in an educational capacity.

² For an overview, see Chism, Nancy (2004). "Characteristics of Effective Teaching in Higher Education: Between Definitional Despair and Certainty," *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching* 15(3): 5-36.