

Teaching Statement

Manisha Goel

At Pomona, I have taught Principles of Macroeconomics (Econ 51), International Economics (Econ 123), and Economics of Entrepreneurship (Econ 131). In Fall 2015, I will teach a fourth course – Advanced Topics in International Macroeconomics (Econ 163). Econ 131 and 163 are new courses that I have introduced in the Pomona curriculum.

These four courses span from the very first course in college level economics to one of the most advanced. This gives me the incredible opportunity to teach students at all levels of their undergraduate careers. Through these courses, I not only interact closely with students majoring in economics, but am also able to reach many non-majors. In each of the four semesters that I have taught so far, my courses were over-subscribed, with the number of students on the waiting list for one section of Econ 51 reaching 31 in Fall 2014, 32 for Econ 123 in Spring 2015, and 34 for Econ 131 the very first time I offered it in Spring 2015! The students who took my classes really liked them, as evidenced by their evaluations. Each time I have taught Econ 51, my evaluations were above 4.5 and reached 4.8 in Spring 2014. In Econ 123, I have received averages of approximately 4.6 and 4.7 the two times I taught the course. The average score of student evaluations in Econ 131 was approximately 4.7 when I taught it for the first time in Spring 2015.

As a teacher, I have three main goals. First, I want to ensure that no student walks out of the classroom wondering how the material covered that day was relevant in the real world. Second, I aim to make my class amenable to the different backgrounds and learning styles of students so that they can play to their individual strengths while working on their weaknesses. Finally, I hope that each class accomplishes more than simply covering the course material; rather, students should be able to develop skills in objective writing, synthesizing information, forming opinions informed by facts, teamwork, and public speaking.

To accomplish these goals, I have developed a large variety of assignments and activities. Some of them are common across all my courses. As a way to help students overcome their hesitation to speak up in class, I use “Face Cards.” These are cards with student photographs and names that I make for all my classes. In Econ 51, at the beginning of each lecture, I use these cards for “rapid fire” rounds. I ask simple questions from the material covered in the previous lecture and whoever’s face card comes up has to answer that question. Although, this might create some stress at the beginning, students soon start enjoying these. In higher level courses, I use these when asking questions and prompting comments from students during the lecture. This technique eventually makes for a more engaged classroom in which students are comfortable asking questions and raising discussions. Obviously, it also ensures that students keep up with the material being covered.

Weekly study groups are another common feature in my classes. Since all homeworks and exams are due on Wednesdays, I hold these sessions on Tuesday nights, 9 to 10:30 pm. In these study groups, students essentially work together on problems and teach each other. I take a

hands-off approach in these sessions. Instead of simply handing them the answers, I often let them figure things out for themselves. They do so in the comfort of the knowledge that if they are confused, I am right there to help. These sessions are always crowded. I have seen how the friendships and partnerships formed in these study groups sometimes continue into subsequent courses that students take together. These sessions are also quite informal and help me form a rapport with my students. They are wildly popular in Econ 51.

I also extensively use podcasts, documentaries, movie clips, and news articles. Often students listen or watch these media ahead of class, but sometimes in class too. Not only do these bring seemingly abstract concepts to life, they also help build deep comprehension through multiple forms of exposure to the same concepts. For instance, in my Econ 51 class, students are often confused about the difference between “change in demand” and “change in quantity demanded.” So, I show them a humorous clip from the movie, *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Then I ask them to identify two different situations in the clip: one that is a change in quantity demanded and one that is a change in demand. Some students get it right. Some don’t. Then I ask two students to come to the whiteboard and make diagrams to depict the two situations and explain to the class. No student answers future questions on this concept incorrectly! Several comments received from students encourage me to continue this practice. Now I am always on the lookout for audios, videos, and articles that relate to topics that I discuss in my courses; the repository is building up quickly!

Sometimes I use these media to spark class discussions on controversial issues. In my International Economics class, for example, we spend a week discussing the labor market effects of outsourcing in developing countries. I realized that many students viewed outsourcing as “evil,” thanks to the popular narrative that equates outsourcing to sweatshops. I asked students to watch Leslie Chang’s Ted talk, *The Voices of China’s Workers*, wherein she describes the ways in which lives of China’s workers have improved since they left their rural farms to work in factories. Students came charged to the next class. I used this passionate moment to discuss objectively how economic tools and empirical evidence can help us understand the pros and cons of outsourcing for workers in developing countries. As I did this, I saw how students who had claimed that “multinational corporations were blatantly violating human rights” were beginning to realize that the reality was far too nuanced to merit that distinction.

To keep such momentum going in the interim between classes, occasionally I set up an online discussion forum that students use actively. Initially, I start off some of these discussions by posting a recent news article that illustrates some of the things they learn in class. As we progress through the quarter, students themselves begin to post articles on current issues and do very well at relating them to class material. I experimented a bit with this approach in my Economics of Entrepreneurship class – I asked students to build a class website – a platform where they could engage in discussions about various startup success and failure stories, entrepreneurship policies, etc., all of which were quite animated.

To enhance teamwork, students in both my elective courses (Econ 123 and Econ 131) do group projects. Moral hazard is alleviated in these group settings because students evaluate

each other's contribution to the project at the end of the semester. Often, students in these groups take a while to get accustomed to their partners' working styles but eventually they really figure it out. It is delightful to see them becoming more mature and more accommodating of each other over time.

In pursuit of my broad objectives, I also tailor some activities to the unique demands of each course.

Principles of Macroeconomics: Econ 51 is the first economics course we offer at Pomona. As their first economics professor in college, I consider it my responsibility to enable students to appreciate the incredibly vast set of real world phenomena that simple economic tools can explain. My aim in this course is to make them fall in love with the subject, or at least, feel wiser with their newfound understanding of the myriad aspects of our everyday lives that they might have pondered over. Getting even halfway to achieving these lofty goals takes a considerable amount of creativity and countless hours! This challenge is compounded by the fact that the majority of these students are first semester college freshmen with different levels of preparation.

Given the unique aspects of the course, I try to do things to get students in the habit of seeking help, and enhance their ability to work hard and multitask – skills that I hope will serve them well throughout their college lives and beyond. Thus, I constantly encourage them to talk to me and ask questions over email, in my office, and over meals. I always answer their emails very promptly. I give frequent and challenging assignments and exams, but also offer copious amounts of help, lest they become overwhelming. In the academic year 2013-14, I started a mentor session run by a relatively senior student for students taking Econ 51 in any section. The feedback from students was very positive in both semesters and so we continued doing it in 2014-15. In addition, I recommended a few former Econ 51 students to serve as fellows at the Quantitative Skills Center. Students have given glowing feedback about these QSC sessions. We also started a Math camp early in the semester for students taking introductory economics courses.

To achieve my goal of getting them interested in economics and understand the world better, I use contemporary events, news and other media very intensively. This shows students how simple but seemingly abstract graphs and figures are so powerful in capturing everyday events. On several occasions, discussions around real world phenomena are followed by comments like, "Professor Goel, if even we are understand this with only a few weeks of economics, why don't the politicians get their policies right?" I must confess that I don't really have good answers to these oft-repeated questions, and I often just joke about it, saying, "Let's ask our Politics professors!"

I know that I have achieved my goals for this course, when a student states, "...My interest in the subject field has dramatically increased and though I was not originally considering this subject as a major I now am. Professor Goel is easily the best professor I have ever had or heard of when it comes to helping and being there for students outside of class...Manisha Goel

obviously cares deeply about her students...”

International Economics: I teach Econ 123 in a unique setting. At Pomona, this is an elective for economics students, and a requirement for students majoring in International Relations. Moreover, international trade is a subject that is especially marred by popular rhetoric, extremely controversial, and with strong opinions held by most people. In this context, two goals that take more prominence in this than in other courses are to help students learn to (a) form opinions informed by facts and (b) synthesize information. I structure this course to cater to these considerations.

Towards the first goal, I divide the semester into two halves – first theory and then current research topics. Doing theory for the first eight weeks helps build a solid foundation for the second half. During the latter, we read and discuss academic papers on one controversial topic every week. In the classroom discussions, I often ask students to recognize whether they are citing a fact or stating an opinion. I also play the devil’s advocate and give fact-based counterarguments. I have been told by many students that this class has challenged their long held beliefs about trade.

Further, students participate in classroom debates – each student has to make a unique argument that is substantiated by facts and economic intuition. For instance, one topic I chose for a debate was “Fair trade is more important than free trade.” I provided them with several journal articles to help them build arguments. Many students realized that evidence on the subject was far from the popular rhetoric and political discourse. Moreover, they learned to present succinct verbal arguments and contradict each other respectfully.

Towards the second goal, students do “Bird’s Eye View” presentations. As the name suggests, students pick a topic from a list and give a short presentation that provides an overview of the current literature on the topic. I provide the most salient papers on the topic to them and help them build a story by organizing the information they get from these papers. Students also write an extensive literature review as part of their term papers for the course. This helps them build the skill to cull information from several scholarly sources and develop a comprehensive set of arguments.

Economics of Entrepreneurship: I taught Econ 131 for the first time in Spring 2015. My motivation in developing this course was to (a) introduce this new area of research in economics to students at Pomona and (b) bring my own research into the classroom. In developing the content and activities for this course, I experimented with several new ideas. I anticipated that although the course was not intended to teach students how to be an entrepreneur, many might come in with that expectation. I did inform them early on that the focus of the class was on the economics rather than the practice of entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, I developed a few activities for this course to meet this expectation to some extent, without diluting the academic rigor, and still trying to achieve my broad goals.

I introduced community partnership as a large part of the requirements and deliverables

for the course. Using a questionnaire that I developed, ten pairs of students interviewed local business owners. They asked them for information on how and why they started their businesses, their experience running them, finances, challenges they face, and their expectations for the future. After writing their small business reports, students took inspiration from some aspect of their business partners and wrote a larger research paper on it. For instance, one pair of students interviewed two French men who own *Bardot*, a restaurant close to campus. The students decided to study immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States – how it contrasts with entrepreneurship among U.S. born workers, and how immigration policy influences it. Although I was quite apprehensive about the community partnership experiment, the feedback I received from students was extremely positive. Community Partnership is here to stay!

Another experiment I did was to ask students to contribute weekly to a class website. The purpose here was to allow students to share their thoughts and online resources on all things entrepreneurship, but which the classroom wasn't quite the right space for. The model of this activity evolved over the semester. Although there were some hiccups along the way, the end result was a very rich and thoughtful website.

I also invited two guest lecturers – a Pomona alumnus who is now a highly successful entrepreneur, and a senior economist at the Public Policy Institute of California and an expert on entrepreneurship among immigrants. Both guests spent full days at Pomona and students got several opportunities to interact with them. I came away with the impression that students thoroughly enjoyed hearing the real life experiences of a serial entrepreneur and getting tips from him. The economist also gave a lunch talk where he spoke to students on how to prepare for careers in public policy.

Another interesting activity in this course involved listening to a weekly episode of The Startup Podcast which chronicles in real time the launch and growth of Gimlet Media, a podcast startup founded by Alex Blumberg, an award winning economics journalist.

I strive to improve as a teacher. What keeps me going is that I thoroughly enjoy teaching. While lecturing, I possibly cannot think of anything else, and so it is rejuvenating. Success comes to me when I know that students see why they learnt what they learnt. It only helps me more in my endeavor when a student leaves a comment such as, “Not only was Professor Goel an amazing lecturer, but she also made it really clear to her students that she cared about us and was there to help us in any way she could. I felt extremely comfortable talking to her and asking her questions...I wish I could take all my econ classes with her.”