

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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One of my most rewarding moments as a teacher was when an engineering student doing a minor in economics told me that he “understood the world better” after taking my class and “never found economics so interesting before.” He now wanted to pursue graduate studies in economics! My aim as a teacher in economics is that no student ever walks out wondering “How are the concepts taught in class today relevant to our everyday lives?” I have developed a style of teaching that uses several tools to help me in the pursuit of this goal.

I discovered very early that my students truly understand the theoretical concepts when they can see how they apply in the real world; in their everyday lives outside the classroom, and sometimes, even within. Thus, for instance, when I teach them about price discrimination, I also tell them that the pizza store across from the university campus is not being benevolent to them by selling a second pizza at half price, and rather is just extracting their consumer surplus. Or, when they learn game theory, they also realize that the best strategy in the game for highest grades in class is for each student to study hard because the grades are based on a curve, and hence, relative. I find that explaining concepts with such real world examples makes learning not only more holistic, but also caters to different learning styles.

Learning from each other, and multiple exposures to the same concepts work well to build deep comprehension. One way that I try to achieve this is through visuals. So, in the last few minutes of a lecture, I often screen short clips from movies or other online videos. Lively discussions ensue afterwards leading to a new level of comprehension for the students. For example, in an intermediate microeconomics class, my students were utterly confused about the difference between “change in demand” and “change in quantity demanded.” So, I showed them a humorous clip from the movie, *The Hudsucker Proxy* (link embedded). Then I asked them to identify two different situations in the clip: one that was a change in quantity demanded and one that was a change in demand. A few students got it right. Others did not. Then two of those who did, came to the chalkboard and made diagrams to depict the two situations. No student answered questions on this concept in subsequent home works or exams incorrectly! Needless to say, such exercises greatly help make learning engaging and enjoyable.

To keep such momentum going in the interim between classes, I also set up an online discussion forum that students use very actively. Initially, I start off some of these discussions by posting a recent news article that illustrates some of the things they learnt 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. Often, I find students using the forum to just clarify concepts and questions with each other. This platform for discussions is very handy to them as they do their assignments and prepare for exams. After a few posts on a given problem, if I see them confused, I intervene and provide hints to point them in the right direction. This way, real world applications, as well as group learning are enhanced not only inside but also outside class. At the same time, my intermittent interventions keep me accessible to them.

This online forum complements but does not substitute for personal attention and one-on-one interaction. Thus, I encourage students to stop by during my office hours, and I make myself available to them more generally. They frequently take advantage of this opportunity. My students know that in these meetings answers to questions will not be handed to them and yet they will not go unanswered. For instance, if they are unsure how to solve a problem on a home work, I break it down so they can take one small step at a time. At the end of this journey through the problem, they have their “Aha” moment. If they come to my office unsure and tentative, comments such as “Oh! I get it now.” make me believe that, they leave confident. Extra office hours - during exam weeks and when homeworks are due - are a regular feature. Email is another mode I use to correspond with students over questions and concerns that they may have. They trust me to answer their emails promptly.

I have come to realize that affability goes a long way in ensuring that students trust me and are comfortable interacting with me. When I am lecturing, only a few students will interrupt me themselves. If I do not stop and prompt them to ask me questions, many queries will go unaddressed. Now, I continuously remind myself to do that. With considerable effort, I have developed the habit of trying to connect with my students. Going into class a few minutes early and chatting with some students about stuff unrelated to class helps me get to know them better, and vice versa. I make it a point to remember as many students by name as possible. Sometimes, in the middle of the lecture, I share small anecdotes with them about my struggles with learning some concepts when I was an undergraduate student in Economics. This especially makes them feel that they are not alone in finding some concepts difficult; it takes others time and effort too.

In almost every class that I have taught, there was a varied mix of students with very different levels of abilities. The better ones may begin to lose interest if things come very easy to them while others may lose interest for precisely the opposite reason. I try to balance the difficulty levels of the questions I include in homeworks and exams. To give an example of a relatively hard problem that I have put on an exam, I gave them an excerpt from a news article about the merger of Continental and United Airlines and asked them to draw diagrams to show how consumers and suppliers may gain or lose from this merger. To prepare them for questions on homeworks and exams, I also provide a few solved practice homework questions. Students find these questions very helpful. In a similar vein, I hold review sessions before exams. Naturally, these sessions are very well attended.

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, “Manisha seems to put forth the maximum effort as an instructor. The information is presented clearly and relatably. Although I probably won’t have done well when all is said and done, I’m still confident that students take out what they put into this class.”