

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The challenge in teaching economics is to convert intangible theories into tangible tools of critical thinking. Given my experience as an instructor for Principles of Macroeconomics and Introduction to Statistical Analysis, I find the best approach to overcoming this challenge is to teach economics as if it were a foreign language. First, I would provide students with the basic vocabulary or economic building blocks, such as opportunity cost and scarcity. These building blocks are used as an underlying theme, which links together each of the theories presented in class and introduces the structure of communication known as “thinking on the margin.” Once given a vocabulary and a framework to structure this new vocabulary, it is the goal of any language to communicate. My goal is to take the economic illiterate and teach them a new method to communicate answers to problems that are important in their lives.

As with a foreign language, the key to learning in economics is through repetitive communication. Communication in a foreign language is through a spoken and written word, but communication in economics can take on several formats. In a given lecture ideas can be expressed either visually, using graphical representation, mathematically, using a system of equations, or verbally, by providing real life examples. This last point was made poignantly evident to me while teaching the relationship between the minimum wage and unemployment during a macroeconomics principle course last spring. At the time, a student movement advocating a living wage for university employees was taking place, providing a perfect backdrop to an in class debate on the minimum wage. The exercise was so successful that I was approached to present a lecture on the living wage at one of the student rallies. Along with communicating verbally, students must also communicate their economic literacy through exams and assignments. Exams and assignments are constructed to test a student’s abilities to communicate mathematically by solving an empirical problem, visually by providing a graphical representation of a word problem, and in writing by providing a response using “plain English” to an economic problem. In addition, I understand that teaching is an evolution, and allow students to improve my methods by providing feedback at least once during the semester.

Lastly, a successful teacher of economics must be interactive, enthusiastic about the subject matter, and most importantly approachable. I find the challenge of teaching to be a fulfilling part of my profession and am often caught saying, “the world would be a better more efficient place if everyone would take at least one economics course.” While ultimately the task of learning falls squarely on the student, it is my teaching philosophy to make this task as inviting as possible.