

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I see teaching as a key component of my mission as an economist: to simultaneously broaden and deepen the world's understanding of the economic forces that impact our lives. Accordingly, I have taken the opportunity to teach two upper-level undergraduate courses during my time at Boston University: The Economics of the Labor Market (which I am currently teaching for the third time), and the Economics of Poverty and Discrimination in the United States. I have also served as a graduate teaching fellow for introductory courses in both microeconomics and macroeconomics. Teaching each of these courses has been a source of great joy for me, and I have taken my responsibilities as an instructor very seriously.

To me, a well-educated student is both well-informed on a range of contemporary policy issues, and prepared to use both theoretical and empirical tools to address whatever economic issues they may confront in the future. So, I have crafted my teaching approach toward building a mix of economic intuition, policy knowledge, and thoughtful empirical skepticism that I believe will best serve my students throughout their future endeavors. I see my role as that of a guide, who provides context and a framework with which my students are able to push their knowledge farther and deeper than they would be able to accomplish on their own.

I see teaching as an iterative process. As a result, I aim to be consistently improving and refining my methods and strategies. However, these are some of the principles that I have found to be most valuable to date, along with examples of the ways that I have employed them.

The importance of constructing a narrative: I aim for my students not only to learn to use a broad set of tools, but also to understand when and why those tools are most useful. Too often, we forget that students who are just beginning their journey into economic reasoning don't always have the broader picture to understand why we do things in the ways that we do. Often, they don't even know what it is that we are trying to accomplish. If a class cannot pass a student's "why should I care" test, then you can be sure that they will not retain any of what they have learned for long.

To that end, I begin all of my upper-level undergraduate courses with a lecture about the purpose of economic modeling and the value and limitations of positive economic reasoning. This is followed by a lecture in which I provide some recent statistics for high-level context, and in which I also point to some of the biggest open questions in the field. In my labor economics course, this has included not only straightforward policy questions like "what are the labor market impacts of the minimum wage," but also more open ended questions like "why is labor force participation for men declining," or "what will be the long-run impacts of automation on the demand for labor?" Throughout the course, I make it a point to revisit these high level questions, providing an opportunity for students to reexamine their initial thoughts with the benefit of their newly discovered theoretical and empirical tools.

A "questions first" approach: In economics, we often strive to construct and solve neatly packaged models of the world. However, many students come to find this parsimony to be a vice, rather than a virtue, because they do not recognize that models give us frameworks that we can use to answer specific questions about the behavior of individuals and firms. To address this concern, I put the

questions at the forefront. In each lecture, I begin with a series of questions, often open ended, that the day's materials may help students to answer. Often, these questions are the subject of considerable ongoing research. The goal of presenting these questions is not to ensure that each student ends the course with a well-formulated series of answers, but instead to ensure that each student understands why it's so important that we continue to analyze the world in such a careful and reasoned way.

This “questions first” approach has allowed me to raise the level of expectations for my courses, and it has helped to convince students that doing so is worthwhile. Students become more confidently engaged when they understand not only what it is that they are looking for, but when they also understand that not all of the answers are known. They become more willing to take creative risks in the ways that they apply their economic intuition, but they also seem to retain more of the course material. The approach underscores the value of learning challenging material not just for the duration of the class, but also for its potential usefulness far into the future, regardless of whether they intend to continue beyond an undergraduate-level education in the subject.

High expectations combined with ample opportunities for feedback: To be frank, I have frequently been disappointed in the level of preparation of my students when they begin my courses. Many of our students, even advanced undergraduate economics majors, have difficulty putting the knowledge that we give them into practice. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in my recent course on poverty and discrimination in the U.S. In this course, I asked students to have students write a paper regarding a contemporary anti-poverty or anti-discrimination policy of their choosing, first in a 1-2 page proposal and then through a 4-8 page final paper (with the opportunity to submit drafts for feedback in between). In the proposal, I prompted them to outline the theoretical justifications for the policy, and I asked them to supplement this in the final paper by discussing the empirical evidence of the policy's success or failure, and any significant empirical issues in the research to date.

When they were asked to write rigorously about the theoretical justifications for a policy, many students struggled not to rely on poorly formed intuition, popular tropes, or woefully insufficient popular empirical evidence. In particular, many students initially struggled to identify high-quality source materials from lesser options. However, providing students with the opportunity for continual feedback and improvement was a great success. Once students could see clearly how their economics knowledge could be put to use to analyze the policies that they cared about, students seemed much more willing to address bluntly the shortcomings in their own education. I was able to motivate students to push themselves, with substantial progress among both my best students and my most marginal ones. At the end of the term, multiple students told me how much they had enjoyed the experience. While term papers are not practical or desirable in all courses, I was ultimately pleased with the outcome in this case, and I anticipate that I will use this strategy again in the future.

While I am proud of the quality of teaching that I have provided to date, I look forward to the opportunity to continue to refine my skills long into the future. I also look forward to the opportunity to prepare and teach other courses, including introductory and intermediate-level courses in microeconomics, policy-oriented courses on topics related to my research such as immigration, urban economics, and human capital, as well as graduate-level courses. Truly, the world is in need of more people who can apply economic reasoning to the world's problems, and I am eager to educate them.