

# **A Personal Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

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I have taught an intermediate microeconomics and an introductory macroeconomics course, and have been a teaching assistant for graduate level economics courses for several years. After class I sometimes reflected on how to be a good instructor, and thus wrote down some ideas.

## **Goal of teaching**

On the first day of the class, I let the students know the course objective is not to stuff them with vast details of factual knowledge, though topics covered might be comprehensive. I believe the role of the instructor is to help students find out some topics in economics which interest them, so they are motivated to learn more. Otherwise, they will soon forget everything immediately after the exam.

One necessary condition for a fruitful teaching is to clearly define a goal of the course, which varies with the course levels. First, for an introductory level course, I define the goal as developing economic intuitions. The instructor leads the students to summarize economists-style thinking from daily experiences and real world examples. Second, for an intermediate course, I define the goal as sustaining their economic intuition with some mathematical rigor. Many students actually do not like to use calculus to formalize concepts such as consumer surplus and compensating variation. At this stage, the instructor needs to carefully explain the connections between mathematical derivations and economic arguments. For example, the idea of the lower and upper sum in deriving the Riemann integral is exactly the same as we use economic reasoning to find out the lower and upper bounds of consumers' willingness to pay over the purchased goods. Third, for an advanced level course, I define the goal as sparking creativity. When I lead recitations for those courses, I always try to solve problems with as many methods as possible. I also ask students to critically evaluate others' solutions. I try to convince students that ways to tackle a problem is not unique, and the textbook may or may not give us the best way to solve the problem.

## **Methods of teaching**

Merely a promise that something interesting will happen in class is far from enough. A good course requires me as the instructor devoting substantial time and efforts, preparing every freshly-made slide (not just downloading the fully-cooked PPTs from the publisher's site),

writing some interactive little software to demonstrate economic analysis, collecting recent events for in-class discussion, and carefully designing the tests, which should reflect the key concepts and insights that the instructor hopes students to grasp and not to forget easily.

I never take class attendance into grades account. I believe students come to class regularly only if they think attending the course worth their time. Otherwise they should spend their time on other activities with higher payoffs. I adopt the TPS (Think, Pair, and Share) and find those in-class activities can repel the fatigue of lecture and note-taking, harmonize teaching and learning, and most importantly, make every student an active thinker. Especially, I feel surprised how big the encouragement is received by a shy student when I just reward the contributor a smile.

Feedback plays an important role in active learning. The instructor had better get familiar with as many students as possible. Anonymity discourages learning. One good way to monitor students' progress is to use problem solving questions in the quizzes and exams. On top of assigning scores, I write comments on their performances. I find that feedback does help them to learn. Students feel delighted when their efforts are observed by the instructor, and recognition of students' difficulties is beneficial to both students and me. On the one hand, it helps students to review their studies. On the other hand, it reminds me to improve the lecture so that students can better understand the class materials.