

Teaching Philosophy

I suspected from when I was young that I would like teaching: I found I was frequently asked questions by my peers, and I think in part because I loved working through explanations with them. At this point, I have a fair amount of teaching experience, as a TA and as the teacher of my own courses, and I still love it.

I focus on teaching stories first. In my experience students understand ideas as narratives. It's natural, and it aids in recall. I start with the story, and show how the pictures and the mechanics (the math, etc.) relate to that story, and then return to the story. This is regardless of the complexity of the subject matter: in 101 and undergraduate game theory, the stories are what they can use in other situations, outside of economics classes, either to gain insight into reading the newspaper or evaluating the strategy of real situations they are in. In the graduate level classes I have taught—for example, Micro theory for the incoming PhD students (I was a TA)—although the details are much more complex, the stories are vital. I remember after the professor first taught partial equilibrium and the three conditions explained: “Utility max; that's the demand curve. Profit max, that's the supply curve. And market clearing means ‘they cross.’” That connection, from the new material to what they already knew, had not been made. That's how you remember and assimilate new ideas.

I believe being approachable is a central part of being a good teacher. I ask questions frequently of the class, and expect and receive questions in return. I leave pauses in my presentations to allow for the more reticent to speak up. And I often end class with anonymous feedback: students have five minutes to write one or two ideas that were muddy in class. There is no one-size-fits-all to teaching, so frequent anonymous feedback allows for me to adapt to the needs of these particular students. And when you demonstrate that you take their feedback seriously, it increases their investment in the class.

I think it is important to treat students as mature adults: answer all questions thoughtfully, describe their responsibilities and trust them to perform them. Part of taking students seriously, in my mind, means testing ideas and avoiding busywork. In my 101 class at Oberlin College, I have some arithmetic but very little. Instead, I test the application of economics in action: investigating an economic interpretation of current events, for example. Part of taking them seriously also means being very clear about expectations. I treat grading policy, the syllabus, and directions on exams and assignments as a contract between mature adults, so we all understand expectations and what it means to live up to them.

I really enjoy teaching. I enjoy sitting down with students and working through hard ideas. I enjoy seeing the moments of recognition. And I enjoy sharing that intellectual journey. I've had a few great teachers along the way, who have helped me learn how to think, and I like doing the same.

Teaching Interests

I have a fair amount of experience teaching microeconomic theory at all levels: I have taught (and am teaching) 101 and have taught graduate level micro as well, and soon I will teach an intermediate and advanced undergraduate micro course. (The advanced course is intended to be a transition to graduate-level micro.) I enjoy teaching micro theory.

I currently teach a course in Agent-based Computational Economics, an upper-level undergraduate course which investigates the methodology of agent-based simulation through hands-on exercises and culminates in building an agent-based model to investigate a particular question. I would enjoy teaching a course like that again.

I would also be interested in teaching courses in game theory, decision theory and behavioral economics, mathematical economics, public finance, public choice/political economy, and the history of economic thought. I am also enthusiastic about developing and teaching other courses.