

Teaching Philosophy

The ideas of economics are transformative. I want my students to realize that economics is more of an approach than a topic, and that basic ideas like selection and opportunity costs will help them understand the world. Whether or not my students become economists, I hope they leave my classroom with certain habits of thought, like thinking on the margin, that will help them make decisions throughout their lives. I aspire to deliver lessons that they will remember.

These insights are profound and broadly relevant but they are sometimes subtle or counter-intuitive; it is my challenge as a teacher to make them easy to understand. In service of that goal, I emphasize four principles: organization, dialogue, making the material relatable, and constant improvement of my teaching.

Organization means two things, both of which are upfront investments that pay dividends for students. First, it means arranging the material in each lesson so the lesson has a natural flow. I want students to ask questions that lead to the next topic. Second, it means administering the course fairly, predictably, and efficiently. As the head teaching assistant for a large microeconomics lecture, I developed software to speed the process of editing and printing exams, giving us more time to help students prepare.

Perhaps a reflection of my own learning style, I like to maintain a dialogue with students. I encourage them to interrupt me with questions or to visit me during office hours. Their questions are revealing. They help me develop new ways of explaining concepts and they help me evaluate my own performance as an instructor.

Good teaching helps students relate to the content. A student should know not just the equations of a model but also the real-world behavior it represents. I take inspiration from one of my committee members, who incorporates manual labor in his undergraduate courses. In his undergraduate course on economic history, he emphasizes the profundity of the cotton gin by distributing unginning cotton for his students to separate by hand. This tangibility helps students with understanding and recall. Teaching introductory undergraduate courses, I made the material more memorable by connecting basic economic concepts to a methodology or a research question. For example, after a discussion of externalities, I might ask “how much should we subsidize bed nets?” and then briefly discuss the relevant research at the beginning of our next meeting.

The most important thing I have learned as an instructor is that good teachers hone their craft. Success comes from preparation and continuous refinement. From the motivation to study the notes for the same lecture you gave last semester and revise even the things that worked well enough. From the recognition that even small tweaks can improve student understanding and that those small tweaks compound like interest. I will bring this discipline to my future classes.

Teaching Experience

I have taught a variety of courses to a variety of audiences. I have experience in introductory micro and macro; I am also comfortable teaching intermediate micro and macro. I would be glad to teach introductory and intermediate econometrics, given my experience teaching statistical software and program evaluation. I would be excited to teach development or environmental economics at any level, including graduate field courses. Finally, I am working on a syllabus that would use recently published books by well-known development economists as the basis for an undergraduate “Approaches to Economic Development” class.

Teaching Performance

The Department of Economics awarded me a written citation in recognition of my performance as an instructor. Available upon request.

In optional, online evaluations of their instructors, Michigan students respond to a variety of prompts on a 5-point scale where a 5 indicates “Strongly agree” and a 1 indicates “Strongly disagree.” In the table below, I provide my scores in each semester for the following prompts:

1. Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher.
2. The instructor explained material clearly and understandably.
3. The instructor handled questions well.

The final column of the table reports the number of respondents and the total number of students in each class.

Semester	Class	1.	2.	3.	Resp. / N
		Excellent Instructor	Explained Clearly	Handled Qs Well	
Fall 2011	ECON 102a	4.83	4.83	4.93	8 / 19
Fall 2011	ECON 102b	4.71	4.71	4.81	11 / 17
Winter 2012	ECON 102a	4.30	4.33	4.33	12 / 32
Winter 2012	ECON 102b	4.58	4.71	4.58	11 / 33
Fall 2012	ECON 101a	4.43	4.75	4.82	15 / 34
Fall 2012	ECON 101b	4.69	4.60	4.83	21 / 32
Winter 2013	ECON 101	4.85	4.78	4.78	15 / 31
Fall 2013	ECON 101	4.85	4.69	4.63	14 / 33
Winter 2014	ECON 101	4.81	4.89	4.81	11 / 30

Finally, here are some compliments from former students:

“The quality of the instruction was very high.” — Intro to Macro, Fall 2011

“Austin was a fantastic GSI ... [he] constantly went out of his way to help all of his students, and he was a very knowledgeable GSI.” — Intro to Macro, Fall 2011 “Austin was awesome.” — Intro to Macro, Fall 2011

“Austin Davis was a fantastic teacher and without him I could have not succeeded nearly as much as I have all semester.” — Intro to Macro, Winter 2012

“Austin really knows his economics. Always described everything very clearly and broke concepts down so everyone could understand them. Great GSI!” — Intro to Micro, Fall 2012

“My GSI, Austin Davis, was extremely helpful this semester. He was very patient with all the questions that I had, was always prepared for class and office hours, and was very approachable and kind. He’s the best! ” — Intro to Micro, Fall 2012

“Austin not only had a firm handle on the course material, but he made the discussion sections more entertaining and engaging for the students. I think his teaching style was good for getting the information you needed (i.e. review lectures, practice problems) while also leaving room for any student questions.” — Intro to Micro, Winter 2013

“Austin Davis was an extremely knowledgeable GSI in this course. I greatly appreciate his help or my success in the class. Not only did he master the principles of Econ 101, he was

able to make his students smarter.” — Intro to Micro, Fall 2013

“The instructor was very knowledgeable about the subject matter and explained everything thoroughly. There was an opportunity to have any questions answered from lecture. Going to discussion greatly helped me learn the material.” — Intro to Micro, Winter 2014