

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Jacqueline Strenio

When I first started teaching, I was terrified of students' questions. I would lecture until the last minute of class, afraid of the possibility of raised hands. However, over the years I have come to appreciate those raised hands and now leave ample room for them during class time. I have learned that teaching does not mean feeding information to students in the hopes they can repeat it back on an exam. Rather, teaching is acting as a guide and providing a framework that gives students the space and support to search out information, draw connections across academic material, current events, and their own experiences, and in the process, continuously ask questions. The most important things I can leave my students with are these questions, the curiosity that inspires them, and the tools to find answers. Beyond providing kindling for economic curiosity, my teaching philosophy is guided by the following core principles:

1 The necessity of diversity and inclusivity

The word "diversity" usually conjures up images of diversity of identity. While diversity of identities among both students and faculty is necessary, it is not sufficient to create inclusive learning communities. Diversity in pedagogy and content are also imperative.

Economics is disproportionately male and pale.¹ While this might seem like a superficial distinction, it has broad implications for the vitality of the field. Our backgrounds influence the perspective we use to approach questions and the methodology we use to answer them. More importantly, it influences the questions we ask in the first place. Diversity in social identity is imperative for innovation and necessary for questioning the status quo. Students need to see mentors of all identities, and this diversity among faculty helps draw new and traditionally underrepresented scholars into the field.

I make a conscious effort to include a diverse set of competing perspectives and theories and purposefully include work by women and ethnic minorities. For example, when discussing poverty in my Current Economic Problems class, we cover alternative definitions of poverty, including time poverty and capability deprivation a la Amartya Sen. Similar to the importance of faculty mentors of all identities, students should be exposed to a variety of authors, theories, models, and methodologies. A pluralistic approach to economics is necessary not only for intellectual vitality, but also for creating diversity among scholars, be they students or faculty.

2 Student-centered learning: active learning and transparency

My commitment to diversity extends to my teaching style as well. My pedagogical approach focuses on student-centered learning with an emphasis on active learning and transparency. Student-centered learning puts the student, rather than instructor, at the center of the learning process in

¹CSWEP 2017. *The 2016 Report on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession* and CSMGEP 2016. *Report of the Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession (CSMGEP)*.

order to focus on the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and needs of students while recognizing and treating them as individuals.

I use a variety of active learning strategies, including discussions and small group work, to encourage communication and collaboration among students and between them and myself. Since learning styles and preferences vary, I incorporate both individual and collaborative activities into my lesson plans. Frequent individual activities, like one-minute essays, ask students to recall and apply content from the lecture, improving information comprehension and retention. Group work enables students to learn from the breadth of perspectives of their peers and become more comfortable expressing their own ideas and opinions. These strategies help me accommodate a diversity of preferences and students themselves acknowledge the benefits of such activities. After my Summer 2017 class, one student wrote “The percentage of content absorbed was extremely high and you walk away from a three hour lecture with energy about the topics discussed.”²

Creating transparent assignments and assessments is another evidence-based pedagogical approach to cultivating inclusivity. In my teaching, transparency involves detailing the purpose (including the skills and knowledge necessary), the specifics of the task itself, and the criteria for success (rubrics or examples of successful submissions) for each assessment. Such structuring of assignments has been shown to be especially important in encouraging participation and success from historically underserved college students, including first-generation and low-income students by specifying details that may appear obvious to faculty, but can be complex and confusing to individuals with different backgrounds.

3 Meaningful content: current events and real-world applications

I encourage questions and critical thinking about the material in my courses as well as broader current events. This approach allows me to teach by example and start students on the path to recognizing economic themes in their everyday lives. To encourage students to pay attention to class concepts in the real world, I incorporate Yellowdig participation into their final grade. Yellowdig is an online platform that allows students to pin articles, videos, and other web-based content to a course board. Essentially, it is the nerdier cousin of Pinterest. Yellowdig is also gamified so that students earn points for posting content and interacting with their classmates’ pins. This encourages collaboration and conversation outside the classroom.

When I see articles, songs, or movies that speak to economic ideas we have covered in class, I post them on Yellowdig and also incorporate them into class discussions and activities. In my History of Economic Doctrines class, I use the lyrics of a popular Bob Marley song, “Money is numbers and numbers never end. If it takes money to be happy, your search for happiness will never end,” to help illustrate the ancient Greek idea of ‘*chremastistike*,’ or the accumulation of wealth just for wealth’s sake. Using such examples and asking students to interpret them helps them make the leap between definition/theory and their own observations about the world. Bridging this gap is one of the best ways to reinforce course material. On the basis of assessment results, I can tell it also helps students retain concepts.

²Anonymous student. 2017. Student course feedback report for ECON 3190: Intro to Health Econ Summer 2017.

4 Incorporating current research

Using real-world examples goes beyond illustrating definitions and also applies to incorporation of real-world examples of current research. When introducing tools of economic analysis in my Health Economics course, students get the standard textbook overview of cost-benefit analysis, but I also have them read two recent peer-reviewed journal articles that conduct cost-benefit analyses.³ This exposes them to scholarly work and allows them to see how the methodologies they study are implemented. I chose articles on cost-benefit analyses of supervised injection facilities in Baltimore and San Francisco because they cover a topic of local interest to my Utah students (the opioid epidemic) as well as open an important segway into a discussion about the role of economic analysis in policy decisions. I ask students to hypothesize why neither city has moved forward with construction of these facilities despite the authors' estimations of large economic benefits. Students invariably see the tension between economically rational results and politically- and socially-acceptable realities. This teaches students to think critically not just about the course material but about its implications for the real world.

5 Continual professional development

Just as I expect progression from my students, I work to personally grow as an instructor. I improve my teaching by collaborating with other graduate instructors and faculty across the University of Utah campus through my work as a Graduate Fellow at the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence and participation in a variety of workshops and symposiums, including a campus-wide Inclusivity Forum. I also seek out economics-specific pedagogy. I attended a full-day session on Teaching Health Economics at the 2017 International Health Economics Association Congress at Boston University and participated in the Institute for New Economic Thinking's Education Initiative Convening at the University of California, Berkeley in May 2017 on pluralistic teaching strategies. Such opportunities challenge me to strengthen my teaching methods and content.

6 Classrooms as inclusive learning communities

My commitments to diversity, student-centered learning, meaningful content, integration of current scholarship, and continual self-improvement are purposefully undertaken with the aim of turning my classrooms into inclusive learning communities. I view inclusive learning communities as classrooms in which students that traditionally feel excluded—excluded from having their voices heard, excluded from higher education, excluded from economics—are intentionally integrated and made to feel comfortable and excited about participating in the learning process. I am most excited about the opportunity to teach in a liberal arts environment because I believe the commitment to a broad and well-rounded undergraduate education espoused by such institutions offer an important support system for transforming economics classrooms into diverse and inclusive learning communities.

Beyond simply answering student questions in my teaching, I encourage them to ask more. Learning happens when students begin to ask their own questions about the things they read and

³Irwin, Amos, Ehsan Jozaghi, Brian W. Weir, Sean T. Allen, Andrew Lindsay, and Susan G. Sherman. 2017. "Mitigating the heroin crisis in Baltimore, MD, USA: a cost-benefit analysis of a hypothetical supervised injection facility." *Harm Reduction Journal* 14(1): 14-29 and Irwin, Amos, Ehsan Jozaghi, Ricky N. Bluthenthal, and Alex H. Kral. 2017. "A cost-benefit analysis of a potential supervised injection facility in San Francisco, California, USA." *Journal of Drug Issues* 47(2): 164-184.

the way the world works. I strive to empower students to answer these questions themselves using the theories, tools, and frameworks they have learned throughout my courses.