Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Yixiao Jiang September 21st, 2022

My teaching philosophy can be summarized in three sequential actions: relate, recognize, and reinvigorate. That is, to make real-world connections to course material from the start, to keep all students engaged through interactive activities, and to strengthen the knowledge they have gained by confronting any limitations they maintain at the conclusion of the course.

This philosophy emerged from my tenure at Christopher Newport University, where I taught 19 sections of four classes at various student competency levels. In **The Economic Way of Thinking**, a survey class for non-majors, I learned that good examples help to create context and relevance in the classroom and therefore promote interest in the subject. In **Principle of Microeconomics**, I learned to use game-based learning assignments, role-playing activities, and in-class simulations to create an interactive learning environment in which each student is recognized. In **Quantitative Method of Economics**, I learned how to implement a flipped classroom model to make lectures more effective, inclusive, and engaging. In **Topics in Financial Economics**, a senior seminar course, I challenged my students to expand their knowledge domains by creatively destructing what they had learned.

I build contexts and relevance in the classroom in two steps. In the very first lecture, I draw all students into the course by providing real-world examples to demonstrate the significance and relevance of the subject matter. As the course proceeds, instead of using examples from the book, which are often outdated and dry, I allow students to take the lead in creating examples based on their own interests and experience. Both methods help to establish an explicit connection between the course material and the learner's experience. As a result, students are more likely to achieve deeper and longer-lasting learning.

Once my students clearly see how the information they are learning is relevant to the world around them, I strive to engage each and every student, no matter his or her background or ability, through a number of interactive activities. These activities serve as an antidote to the abstraction of the economic model being discussed: Instead of receiving knowledge in a passive manner, students can actively learn the concepts dynamically by being part of the system that generated them. In addition, because completing the activity requires only basic comprehension skills, students from various academic background feel less of a barrier to entry.

In the principle-level classes, my favorite in-class activity is to simulate a market economy in which students are divided into buyers and sellers. Next, buyers (sellers) are asked to write down their levels of willingness to pay (sell) as well as their best guesses for the equilibrium price. Then, I (the "government") announce a price and count the number of willing buyers and sellers. When the quantity supplied differs from the quantity demanded, I ask my students, "In which direction should the price change, and why?" After the role-playing activity, I find that my students have a much better understanding of the dynamic feature of market equilibrium. For intermediate-level courses that emphasize quantitative skills, I engage students by employing a flipped classroom setting, where students can navigate through lengthy mathematics by working collaboratively as a group. In addition, instructors can utilize the latest instructional technology's breakout room feature when classes are conducted virtually. The first time I taught Quantitative Method of Economics, I experienced blank stares and awkward silence after lecturing on the mathematical content. After some reflection, I switched from the didactic lecture format to a more interactive one, where students were tasked with completing a worksheet in groups. The learning environment became less monotone, as I was conducting the class in three complementary formats: group discussion, student presentations, and instructor lecturing.

It is my strong conviction that the knowledge gained in the classroom has an everdecreasing lifespan. To offset the effect, instructors need to foster progressive learning before the conclusions of their courses to create long-term learners who are capable of doing new things. To this end, in the final week, apart from summarizing the key points to "put a bow" on the course, I confront students with the fact that having a theoretical knowledge of something does not imply possessing a deep practical understanding it. In many cases, this effort leads to independent studies and research collaboration with selective students beyond the standard curriculum.

For advanced classes, which focus on analytical skills and procedural knowledge, I believe it is absolutely essential to inform students of the limitations and flaws of what they have learned. All models are simplifications of reality, meaning that their implications are legit only if certain assumptions are satisfied. As such, I exhort my students to (i) critically examine the suitability of a model before applying it to a real-world scenario and to (ii) creatively tweak the model to improve its usability. In teaching Topics in Financial Economics, where students are tasked with working on a stock pitch project, one student found an irregular (high) dividend in Aug. 2021 for the company under study, which invalidated the standard dividend growth model. Motivated by his intellectual curiosity, the student undertook an independent study with me in the following semester and we attempted to develop a refined model allowing for stochastic dividend payments.

Thus, my teaching career to date has embodied the philosophy where I foster long-term learning through creating relevance, active engagement, and post-class mentorship. These actions not only promote effective learning in the classroom but also provide future avenues for progressive learners beyond the classroom.

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