

Teaching Statement

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An economics teacher is responsible not just for instilling economics concepts like supply and demand curves, but also for equipping students with a real-world economic sense to help them make daily life decisions. I want students to apply economic theories to analyze the causes of market failures, the externalities, and the effectiveness of economic policies. Conveying these economic concepts will offer students another lens to view the bigger world and their own lives.

1. Spark students' curiosity

Economics contains lots of equations and figures that can easily bore students. Making the class interesting and piquing students' curiosity is important to conveying economic concepts. Starting class lessons with a story, especially one that relates the teacher's own experience, instead of directly jumping to economic theories may catch students' attention. For example, I could tell about my own experiences choosing to work or pursue my Ph.D. to introduce the concept of opportunity cost.

Moreover, daily life also provides a good source for stories. When introducing revealed preference, I could use house purchasing as an example—house prices near good private schools are higher than those with similar characteristics that are not close to private schools. The price difference reveals people's preference on the “near private schools” factor. Other examples, such as externality, could include asking students how they feel about cigarette smoking, which is enjoyable for certain individuals and thus increases their utility; however, it is harmful to the health of both themselves and those around them.

Visualization is also a good option for catching students' attention. When talking about pollution abatement in an environmental class, showing how pollution affects the environment could be a good choice. When I gave a presentation about China's water pollution, I showed dead pigs floating in one of China's major rivers in 2013. The audience was shocked by the water pollution due to low regulation of the hog industry.

Lastly, inviting guest speakers from both academia and industry would be a good way to show students how economics works from different angles; thus giving students some ideas on where and how economics could work in different areas, why economics has different focuses, and what they want their focus to be.

2. Get students involved in the class

Getting students' attention is the first step. The second step is to keep their curiosity, and getting them involved inside and outside the class is a good way to do so. I would employ a variety of active learning techniques by creating a positive learning atmosphere for all my students and making the classroom experience interactive and enjoyable. For example, organizing a debate and asking students to provide evidence supporting or opposing one claim using economic language is

a good way to consider the impact of a policy (e.g., environmental regulation on the hog industry). By learning more about the claim they are defending, students can learn more about the corresponding preference and the choice for each role.

Another method to encourage students' participation is to ask them make observations in their daily life and relate it to what they learn. Take price discrimination as an example—students could provide an example of price discrimination on campus and analyze it in economic language. Group talk is another way to help students understand economic theories. It is rewarding when students share their own stories behind a topic, thus making them deeply understand the concept and help each other.

3. Adjust to students' diverse expectations and understanding

Undergraduate students, especially freshmen, come to principal courses with diverse backgrounds; and thus it is crucial not to leave any student behind. In my experience working as a TA in the help room, I saw students struggle with questions, and I employed several explanatory methods that combined figure-drawing and storytelling to offer economic intuition. If a student was not good at mathematical computation, I patiently taught them step-by-step. To avoid students memorizing the answer, I changed questions slightly and asked them to solve it again to make sure they understood. Furthermore, when I gave recitation on ECON101, I prepared multiple methods to explain the example questions for the final exam. Instead of just writing down the equations, I left time for students to follow along and I asked if they understood each step. After writing, I explained the answer combining economic concepts and equations to offer them economic intuition.

Teaching basic economic theories is different from teaching how to do research—instead of mainly instilling knowledge, teaching how to do research is more about showing how to achieve research targets. When I was a master's student at CUHK, I taught one undergraduate student how to find data based on specific questions and further organize and code the data. She valued my teaching and helping her learn the basics of doing research.

English proficiency in both speaking and writing is important when giving lectures to students, especially non-native speakers. In addition to my experience as a TA, I also led Zoom interviews with growers to ask them how their cucurbit farming was going. I was able to accurately convey my questions to the growers and correctly understand the problems they encountered when farming. Furthermore, I have written blogs and technical reports for the general public and apple and cucurbit crop growers for interdisciplinary projects funded by USDA, which shows my proficient writing skills.

It takes time and effort to be a good teacher—good teaching is not a gift, but a skill. In the future, I would like to teach courses related to my fields of study such as Environmental and Natural Resources Economics and Energy, the Environment, and the Economy. It would be great to convey what I have learned to benefit others, and I am excited to improve myself as an educator.