

## Teaching Philosophy

The person who showed me what teaching is really about was the basketball coach of my elementary school. He was good at designing a lot of experiments that could turn hard practices into fun. I still remember waking up every morning at 5am to join his game of training. He had that magic to make us believe basketball is a friend, so that we felt hurt when observing someone disrespecting it, even just by sitting on a ball. Moreover, he firmly trusted and knew our potential despite our self-denial. Once he invited an amateur college team to play with us—a bunch of tiny fifth grades, we all felt he was pushing too hard. But he just smiled and said: “Do your best.” Surprisingly, we won that game by 1 point and we gained a great confidence after that game.

I started to be aware of my talent for teaching in middle school. Classmates told me that they felt comfortable in discussing content with me because I could simplify hard questions and concepts. However, teachers in my school sometimes looked offended when I brought up a simpler solution than what they had prepared to present and they ignored my effort for not following their procedures. It is part of the Chinese culture that a good student follows the discipline, absorbs teachers’ words quickly and unquestioningly. But from then on, I promised myself that I will always encourage students to think and to express their ideas. Even if they may not respond as expected, it is very likely that they are thinking creatively.

The University of Tennessee has provided me a great opportunity for teaching. As a teaching assistant and an instructor at the later stage, I have not only had the chance to learn with excellent professors, but I have learned lots of things from UT students, such as different ways of thinking and the satisfaction when students told me they find some materials interesting. One of my professors told us in one class to treat a daunting task like training for Marathon as many small segments. Each small segment seems either more achievable or less burdensome than the whole task. So, when I am teaching a class, I try to set small goals for my students so that they can easily build their confidence in learning. I review their class performance weekly to make sure they are capable to achieve the goal I set and no one left behind.

I love economics and am eager to help students understand the world from the perspective of economics. Relating economic ideas to real life can be very intriguing. For example, why is cereal so profitable in a so competitive market? Why is selling your own organs illegal? How does a firm decide which person to hire and how much to pay? What do we know about the effect of computer-based technology on the labor market? Economics is closer to human life than what students normally assume, and it provides a solid mathematical and logical foundation to analyze economic activities. My passion for teaching economics will always be there since I truly believe in and enjoy what I have learned and what I am going to learn from economics.

As an economics instructor, I fully understand that students do best when receiving information from different channels. For example, some prefer to visualize the relationships between ideas, some learn best when interacting with text; some students learn better in an environment that promotes discussion, some students feel more comfortable with a lecture style learning environment. My course design aims to try to address multiple types of learning preferences. I try to design my course such that it will stimulate curiosity for different kind of students. To do that, I assign readings from the lecture notes before each lecture. I try to find real world examples for students to better visualize theoretical explanations. Homework assignments will give students a chance to practice what they have learned during the class and incentivize them to review the textbook and notes. To encourage classroom discussion, I bring interesting questions related to case studies. Students express their own ideas on the topic and get a chance to learn how others think about the issue.

I believe the effectiveness of working within a group, as teamwork, is becoming an increasingly important skill that employers are looking for in the work environment. In order for students to be equipped with the ability of being a good team player, I assign group projects such that students work together and apply what they have learned. The group projects also provide an opportunity to use a peer evaluation method. It gives students the opportunity to evaluate their other group members, and get feedback from their peers.

I always try to make economics engaging and intriguing. When I thought back on my past, I realized that I understood the content better when I enjoyed the learning. I prepare interesting visuals to motivate class energy, prepare clicker questions to give students some break during the lecture, and check if students are following the material being covered. I try to find and bring some interesting statistical information related to a topic, so that students can see interesting, real-world facts about the topic.

Finally, the most rewarding aspect of teaching is that it promotes my own commitment to lifelong learning. I continuously strive to format my courses in a way that keeps students focused, interested and always asking questions. Moreover, I will help them think about the world issues independently and be able to use their intelligence to make the world a better place. My goal is that, I, along with my students, will be able to continuously discover new unanswered questions, followed by the inevitable realization of curiosity.