

Statement of teaching philosophy October 2010

My teaching philosophy is the result of my experience as a teacher and also as a student for more than 20 years, in both the US and Europe. In fact, with both my parents being teachers, school always felt like a second home to me. As a student, I have experienced great teachers, some terrible ones, as well as a lot in between. In my experience, excellent teachers have to be passionate about their subject and striving to instill this same passion in their students. They have to establish a positive class atmosphere by investing time in building a rapport with their students and encouraging active class participation. Moreover, teachers should not just expect respect from the students, but should treat them with the same kind of respect. They should show that they care about their students and are interested in their learning.

During my graduate studies at the University of Southern California, I have been offered the opportunity to work as a research assistant, but I had the chance to be a teaching assistant while at the University of California, Irvine. This experience spanned very diverse classes involving various teaching methods. For the intermediate microeconomics class, the discussion sessions focused mostly on solving problems; during the global economy sessions, the focus was on open discussion of issues; finally, the introductory class in probability and statistics was set in a computer lab and required me to introduce students to the statistical package SPSS. Throughout this experience, I tried to incorporate those aspects of excellent teaching that I had experienced myself as a student.

I believe that life-long learning occurs when students are not just being told facts, but are fully involved in the class and can connect to the information presented. Many people say that they did not really understand economics when they took courses in it. My goal is to have my students leave the class understanding the subject and how to apply it to real life. Teaching economics should go beyond teaching a set of facts and concepts. It should teach students an economic way of thinking about problems that will help them as citizens and in whatever career they decide to pursue.

One thing I realized as a teacher is how diverse classes can be. There are usually differences in majors, but also a variety of economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The most challenging disparity, however, is the difference in student learning styles. Some students understand things better when they are put in mathematical terms, others prefer a more graphical or intuitive explanation, while others like to have real world examples to relate to. In order to appeal to all these styles, I try to combine problem solving, graphical analysis, data visualization, and news stories during the classes.

In order to get my students interested in the subject matter, I convey my own enthusiasm by talking about my research and other work I am doing related to the topics covered in class. This can help students see how theoretical concepts can actually be applied to real world problems.

A teacher should treat students as adults, answering their questions thoughtfully, describing their responsibilities, and trusting them to fulfill these responsibilities. It is important for me to set high standards for my students and, as an instructor, this starts with being well prepared for every class. Based on what I think is important for my students to remember long after they leave college, I set clear objectives for the class. Once these objectives are set, the next step is to develop the means to achieve them, through a curriculum that challenges the students and awakens their interest. Students have to be aware that they need to have a good understanding of the subject matter in order to do well in the class. I write extensive comments when grading exams so that

each student understands why credit was deducted, where there is need for improvement, and also where they have done well.

I believe that creating a class atmosphere congenial enough for students to feel comfortable to express their opinion and approach me with questions is very important because learning is incomplete without questioning. To this end, I encourage my students to contact me frequently as a way to show my concern about their learning. When asking a question in class, I want to encourage them without being patronizing, by waiting until someone offers a possible answer before I explain the concept. Leaving pauses in a presentation also gives the students the opportunity to ask questions if they feel the need to.

One of the things I most enjoy about teaching is personal interaction with students. It is really rewarding to work with students both in class and individually during office hours, and to see them progress. I also take great pride in mentoring students for their research projects and I find that being a mentor teaches me more about research than any single class could. At USC, I have mentored a Master's student and a visiting Ph.D. student from Italy.

A tool that I find very powerful in improving my teaching is listening to student feedback. Students' comments on end of semester forms as well as the views they voice in person are a valuable starting point for future improvements in teaching a course.

I believe that an academic career has two complementary sides: as a researcher, my purpose is to push the frontiers of knowledge further, while as a teacher, I want to awaken my students' curiosity by making them aware of developments at the frontier. As Stephen Brookfield wrote in his book *The Skillful Teacher* (1990), "Teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than what it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you must continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all—What effect am I having on students and on their learning?". My main goal, the dent I want to make, is to encourage my students to become curious, independent life-long learners, to develop critical thinking skills, and gain an understanding of the world we live in.