Teaching Philosophy Statement

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My goals for student learning

When teaching economics and policy, I aim to open students' minds to new ideas and help students develop solid critical thinking skills that they will be able to apply outside of the discipline to make thoughtful and rational decisions on a wide range of societal issues as voters and engaged citizens. There are, in my view, three necessary conditions to achieve this goal. First, study in economics and policy should encourage curiosity in students to motivate them to continue learning outside of class on their own throughout their lives. This is because class time is limited and there is only so much that can fit into a lecture, while economics and policy as a discipline is constantly evolving, just as pressing societal issues are in flux. Second, coursework in economics and policy should strive to bridge the connection between students' academic knowledge of the discipline and their daily lives to increase learning retention. Third, educators in economics and policy must create inclusive learning environments to allow all students to thrive and bring diverse perspectives into the classroom, to better engage with their students, and to attract students from diverse backgrounds into the field.

My teaching methods

My teaching methods are student-centered.

One approach I use to encourage curiosity in my students and to challenge them to think critically is presenting them with a relationship between two variables and asking them whether this relationship is likely causal or not. For example, when I served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) for Intermediate Policy Analysis, I asked students to think about the relationship between the number of police officers and violent crime, income and health, exercise and strength, charitable donations and hunger, stress and mental health, among others. By working through such small exercises, students learn to appreciate the complexity of economic and social relationships and think critically about socio-economic research they encounter, both in academic settings and beyond. At the same time, I heard from my students that such exercises encourage curiosity as students discover that a seemingly straightforward relationship is actually not that straightforward. This leads students to become interested in uncovering hidden factors underlying the relationship.

Another technique I use to encourage curiosity and critical thinking in my students is starting each teaching session with a challenge question, giving students five minutes to come up with an answer in small groups and choose one person from their group to present the group's response. Then, after listening to students' thoughts, I build on their responses to present the solution. For example, as a GTA for Risk Management and Policy, I got to design an assignment and guide students through it. I chose to prove mathematically with a concrete example why an insurance market would unravel in the presence of adverse selection. I started by describing the market setting, and then asked the students to think in small groups about which groups of consumers would be willing to buy insurance in this market, if any, and why. Then, after listening to their predictions, I built on their responses and guided them through the mathematical side of the problem.

Research shows that students can retain learning better if they can relate to the material taught to them and see how their new knowledge can be applied to their lives. One method I use to help students relate to the material they learn in my economics and policy classes is choosing my examples thoughtfully. To me, this means being sensitive to the make-up of the class and choosing examples that as many of my students as possible can relate to and examples that are diverse, so that everyone feels included over the course of the semester. For example, when I served as a GTA for Introduction to Econometrics, I was responsible for teaching weekly laboratory sessions. Each week, I needed to choose a practice problem and go over the problem in the lab. I made sure that the practice problems I chose over the course of the semester were diverse and had something in them that my students would be able to relate to, such as predicting average rent in a college town. My students' feedback confirmed to me that choosing diverse examples to which students can relate helps me with keeping students more engaged and it makes everyone feel included.

My approach to creating an inclusive learning environment

I use several techniques to create an inclusive learning environment for my students.

First, I use my course syllabus to communicate to my students that I strive to create an inclusive and supporting environment for all and direct them to resources that might facilitate their learning. In particular, I include in my course syllabus not only a broad diversity statement, but also several additional statements referring students to relevant resources on campus that I research carefully before preparing the syllabus: an English learners' statement, a mental health / wellness statement, a statement on accommodations, and a statement on bias and harassment.

Second, I strive to ensure accessibility in my classroom. I have been researching how to create accessible course materials, especially those that contain mathematics, in Latex, HTML, and Canvas. In the spring of 2023, I co-organized and co-led "Accessibility in STEM", a workshop that was open to the entire Cornell community, in which I shared with colleagues what I have learned so far. This fall, I am serving as a co-instructor for "Creating Accessible Teaching and Research Documents in STEM", a CIRTL workshop that I developed together with Marissa Gee, a fellow PhD candidate at Cornell.[1] I am planning to apply this knowledge that I developed to improve the accessibility of my teaching materials. Additionally, I try to increase accessibility by giving my students choices over the modes of assignment submission, as I believe this strategy helps accommodate diverse learning and communication styles and abilities. For a concrete example of this, if I ask students to present their research to the class, and if developing public speaking skills is not among my course goals, I give them a choice between making an oral presentation in front of the class and recording a video of their presentation in advance. I do this to accommodate individuals who might have public speaking anxiety or might be struggling with speaking English.

Third, I work to foster an inclusive climate in my classroom by reducing anonymity. The first week of classes, I ask all students to complete a short survey about their preferred name, pronouns, and anything else that they would like me to know about their identity and background. Additionally, I ask students to record them pronouncing their names in Canvas or in an easy-to-use application. This helps me make sure that I do not fall into the habit of calling on the same small set of the most active students, students with easy to pronounce names, or the students who sit in front rows.

Fourth, I value student experiences and work to ensure that all student voices are heard. Throughout the semester, I usually conduct several short anonymous surveys asking students for feedback on my teaching. These mid-semester evaluation surveys provide an important avenue for me to hear my students and adjust my teaching to their needs on the go as opposed to waiting for my teaching evaluations at the end of the semester.

Finally, I make every effort to integrate into my teaching the methods that mitigate any bias that I might bring to my classroom subconsciously. For me, this currently includes the use of clear rubrics in my assessments, the use of anonymous grading if possible, and the use of transparent *quantitative* approaches to tracking class participation. For example, one such quantitative approach to tracking class participation that I used as a GTA in Intermediate Policy Analysis was posing a question at the beginning or end of each class and asking students to respond with an iclicker, and then using the iclicker data to track class participation.

My assessment techniques

In my assessment methods, I follow three principles. First, I align my assessments with course learning outcomes that I develop following Bloom's taxonomy. Second, I balance formative and summative assessments and use the feedback I collect from formative assessments to prepare effective summative assignments. Third, I balance group and individual effort and allow for more than one mode of expression. Broadening modes of learning and assignment submission in this way alleviates anxiety in my students and it enables me to accommodate diverse learning and communication styles and abilities.

Conclusion

Economics and policy is constantly evolving as a discipline. My role as an educator in this field is to open students' minds to new ideas, help them develop intellectual curiosity extending well beyond the discipline, and equip them with critical thinking skills applicable in a wide range of settings and contexts. I will continue working towards these goals through continuous reflection on my teaching experiences and continuous professional development.

[1] CIRTL stands for Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning, which is a network of 45 research universities in the United States and Canada.