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Teaching Statement

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My goal of teaching is to create an active, effective and inclusive environment to foster learning. To achieve this goal, I follow three main principles:

(i) Articulate learning objectives and class policies clearly to keep students organized.

For some people, learning objectives and class policies seem to be the basics of a course. However, I see it as a core piece to form an effective course. A well-defined and specific objective creates a clear target for the student to concentrate on their learning efforts. A clear set of class policies mitigate distractions and the potential conflicts that may interfere with effective learning. Therefore, as an instructor, I cannot only expect students to read the objectives and policies on the syllabus on their own. Instead, I stress it as straightforward as possible for students to perceive. Take my introductory macroeconomics course as an example. I provided a mind map for my students to illustrate the objective of the course. This mind map shows clearly what content objectives students need to achieve at the end of each lesson, at the end of the mid-semester, and the end of the whole semester. Besides, this map also includes specific skills students need to develop, steps to take to achieve a particular goal, and different ways and frequencies to assess them. Typically, I used this kind of mind map in three ways. Firstly, I used it in my first class to show the course expectations. In addition, to motivate students, I double it as a guideline to reiterate and summarize their achievements at the beginning and the end of each week. Lastly, I triple it as a content organizer on my review sessions. Almost all my students comment positively about the way I articulate the learning objectives.

(ii) Celebrate the beauty of diversity to form a fitted and open-minded learning community.

Students are unique in race, ethnicity, language, religion, economic background, prior knowledge, learning needs, etc. These diverse characteristics among students can cause differences in the ways they perceive and understand knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to take a step ahead to understand, respect, and celebrate the uniqueness of each student. Frequently, my way of forming an inclusive learning community has three main stages: information collection, lesson arrangement, and instruction. Take my class as an example. On the first day of my class, I do information collection. I engage students in the “think-pair-share” activity to help everyone get to know each other better. Specifically, I provide index cards to have students write their basic information, at least three unique or interesting facts about them, and at least one major economic topic they currently have an eye on. Then I pair students for self-introduction. Next, each student will introduce the other group member to the whole class. Finally, all other students can ask questions freely to get to know that person better. During this process, I keep taking notes and collect as much helpful information as possible and my questions for the students. Based on my experience, this is an effective way to get to know students and their diverse backgrounds in a lively and respectful manner. With the information I collected in the first class, I actively arranged the lesson objectives, content, and teaching strategies to provide students with more targeted and tailored lessons. One thing that needs to be highlighted is that understanding the diversities of students is not a one-time and done job. As an instructor, I keep exploring students’ learning needs and making necessary adjustments consistently through in-class interactions and out-of-class communications during the whole semester. These three steps can help me create more fitted lessons for students and motivate students to foster a more open-minded and effective learning environment.

(iii) Encourage active learning to stimulate students' motivation.

Learning is an active process. Instead of passively “spoon-feeding” students with knowledge and facts, I choose to create an active environment to help my students enjoy more. To make this happen, I usually pay attention from the perspective of both content and form. One way to lighten students up when teaching content is to connect students to the real world. For example, while covering government spending and tax in my introductory macroeconomics course, I did a case study for “Kansas experiment,” Kansas’s most significant income tax cuts in the state’s history. I showed students the comparison of macroeconomic data between Kansas and neighboring states regarding job creation, unemployment, gross domestic product, and tax collected. I also compared the macroeconomic data for metropolitan statistical areas within Kansas. Students engage themselves in discussing the differences and the underlying reasons actively. In terms of the form of my instruction, I like to incorporate different types of visual stimuli, especially different types of media, to motivate my students. For instance, when I was teaching the core principles of economics, I inserted a 3 mins video about how monkeys of Uluwatu steal high-ticket items to barter for better food from the tourists. And I ask students to reflect on the unprecedented economic decision-making process among monkeys. This video not only deepened students’ understanding of the lesson contents but also doubles as the next class’s trailer to keep them motivated.