

MAX GROSS

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Teaching Statement

One of my favorite lessons to teach as a teaching assistant for a Principles of Economics course covered opportunity costs. I'd ask "What were some of the decisions that you made today? And what else could you have chosen?" and watch faces light up as a fundamental concept in economics suddenly jumped off the page. Moments like this, where students clearly understand theory and its practical applications, best exemplify my two broad goals of teaching. First, I seek to prepare students for success both in and outside of my classroom. Second, I strive to engage students in how course content relates to their own lives and the world around them. In what follows, I describe the teaching practices that I use to address these two goals and review how I assess the effectiveness of these practices.

In order to prepare students for my course and others, I encourage them to learn from each other. I am a firm believer that true understanding is best demonstrated through clear explanation to someone else. Therefore, I build in time after lecturing for students to review concepts and work on practice problems in small groups. In addition to facilitating relationships between students, this also allows me to engage with each group and address individual needs. If I identify common questions or confusion, I bring the entire class back together and offer clarification. For example, when teaching about comparative advantage, it was not until working on a problem in groups about terms of trade that it became clear that the topic was especially tricky for the students. After reconvening the class to review the topic again, I was very pleased to hear each individual group have a much better understanding. Small group learning teaches a crucial lesson— though I am the course leader and play an important support role, every student brings valuable qualities and insights to the classroom.

A supportive and inclusive classroom is imperative for student learning and my work to create one starts on day one. Instead of taking roll call, I ask students to share their names and I respect their stated preference regardless of what administrative records may show. To learn of individual needs, I require all students to fill out a short survey which asks why they enrolled in the class, what their goals are, and if they have any concerns about meeting their goals. Many of my students have replied with apprehension about whether they belong in an economics course because of their background and/or their level of math preparation. Therefore, I tackle these issues from the start and emphasize that all students belong in my class. For example, during my introductory economics course, I shared examples of the many types of topics that economists work on- from finance to health, international trade to education- and highlight the important contributions made by female economists and economists of color. In addition, I reassure the class that my role as their teacher is to make sure that they understand the material and express confidence that we will work together to address any math-related obstacles. I follow these actions throughout the semester by working individually with students after class or in office hours with both patience and understanding. Together through small group instruction and a supportive environment, I aim to empower students for success in my class, their other classes, and eventually throughout their careers.

Economics offers a powerful toolbox for analyzing the world around us and I aim to emphasize this message throughout every lesson. I passionately encourage students to reflect on the practical relevance of course material to both their everyday lives and to broader public policy. When

teaching price discrimination, instead of sharing the classic example of movie theaters offering senior discounts, I handed out a news article about how companies often sell identical products for one price online and another in the store. This led to a memorable discussion of the ethics of such practices. In a lesson about international trade during the 2016 U.S. presidential primary, I described the proposals of the main candidates and had students work in teams to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each. I was pleased when they explained how some proposals would increase consumer surplus while others would increase producer surplus. By stressing the application of economic theory, I seek for my students to become improved decision-makers.

Throughout the semester, I assess whether the students are learning and engaging with course content and whether I am effectively helping them do so. I believe in holistic evaluation to gauge student learning. As a lead instructor in large courses, I will assign group projects to engage with course material in addition to testing. In smaller courses, I look forward to assigning writing-based projects like having students journal on how course concepts apply to their everyday or how class topics can rationalize an economic puzzle. In addition, I will use in-class discussions and presentations to assess student progress. Together, this suite of evaluation methods offer tools to determine whether students are meeting my teaching goals.

Student evaluations of my teaching is as important as my evaluation of their learning. A few times throughout the semester, I hand out short, anonymous comment cards that ask a few standardized questions and allow space for more general feedback. For example, I ask whether pace of my lessons is too fast or too slow as well as whether students are comfortable asking questions. I tailor my teaching for individual course sections according to these mid-semester feedback opportunities. Moreover, after each lesson, I reflect on what I could have explained more clearly and the effectiveness of planned activities in order to adjust similar lessons in the future.

Whether tasked with teaching an introductory course or something more closely aligned with my research interests in the economics of education or labor economics, I look forward to serving as an instructor for students during the term and as a mentor throughout their college careers and beyond. By encouraging students to learn from each other, creating a supportive classroom environment, and engaging with the everyday relevance of course material, I ensure that my students recognize the value of the economics toolbox and have the wisdom to use it responsibly.