

Teaching Statement

Phuong Ho *

I think that knowledge is power and that the process of learning is an endless journey whose goal is to attempt to reach the universe of knowledge which, of course, is infinite. Teaching is an indispensable ingredient in this important quest. In addition, teaching should be highly valued because it prepares students for their subsequent classes, careers, and life paths. To effectively align with this goal, I strive to help students develop fundamental critical thinking and problem-solving skills, provide them with up-to-date information and materials, encourage them to engage with what they are learning, and acknowledge their distinct growth in the educational process.

I have observed that it is easy for students to forget what they learned. Hence, it is important for them to learn how to acquire knowledge that will last and inform their lives instead of simply acquiring facts and formulas. Hence, in my business statistics course, I emphasized the intuition behind every concept and formula, the motivation for it, and the context in which it is used to create value. The goal is for my students, in their future endeavors, to be able to quickly retrieve what they have learned and easily apply it when needed. To develop and assess their critical thinking skills, I do not test memorization and, hence, I provide formula sheets for the exams. I also break down a question into subquestions and sometimes even provide hints so that students can gradually approach a multifaceted problem on their own, which is important in the process of developing their problem-solving skills.

No matter what skills students need to acquire, the thinking process must be developed and refined with extensive and continuous practice. In an online course I taught, by assessing them with regular quizzes, students learned by active practice instead of passive learning. These quizzes also helped me to understand my students better and provided them with timely feedback before they reached a more advanced learning pace. To reduce student worries about grades, I provide nongraded activities such as study-plan homework to encourage students to actively get involved in an environment which will not penalize them for making. I further incentivize the learning process by allowing students to attempt a question three times in their online homework.

Successful teaching must account for the fact that all students are distinct individuals with differences in abilities and background knowledge. Hence, it is imperative to customize the course content, to the extent possible, to different audiences. For example, in my undergraduate business statistics course, I state that expectation is just an average value while in a Ph.D. course for which I was a teaching assistant, expectation is a value and conditional expectation may be a random variable. To fairly assess students, especially since they learn in their own unique way and excel in different areas, I design a final comprehensive exam covering all of the content of my business statistics course with equally assigned points for every question. I also provide students with the greatest possible freedom to demonstrate their understanding by structuring an exam with three parts. The first and largest part consists of mandatory questions that everyone is expected to answer. The second part is optional so that each student can choose how many and which questions they will answer. The student's overall score will be reduced for any wrong answer they provide in this part. The final part includes extra credit questions with no penalties for wrong answers.

Ultimately, educating students should go beyond having them memorize facts and figures. The major goal is to provide students with fundamental skills that will equip them to reach the infinite universe of knowledge. In the endless journey of learning, students should be motivated to be interested in learning per se. At the beginning of their journey, I strive to inspire them as much as possible to seek their various ends. I look forward to a long and productive career as a member of a faculty that works tirelessly to assist students in reaching their goals.

*Department of Economics, University of Arizona. Email: phuongho@email.arizona.edu. Website: www.u.arizona.edu/~phuongho