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Teaching Philosophy

I believe that my most important job as an instructor is not to teach students everything I know about a subject matter, but to encourage them to reach their highest potential and to build confidence in their knowledge of the material. My teaching philosophy is guided by the following three principles:

1. Regardless of how little (or how much) a student knows when he/she first comes to class, every student is capable of learning the material.
2. The class is best understood when students understand how economic concepts can be applied in the real world.
3. Students should always be encouraged to question concepts and feel comfortable discussing their ideas.

First, I believe that it is my responsibility as an instructor to make sure that all of the students in my class begin the course at a common starting point. In courses such as introductory microeconomics where students come from various majors, their background in economics can vary widely (e.g., some students may have taken economics classes in high school while others have no idea what the topic is about). Therefore, I spend the first few class sessions making sure that I make every student in the class comfortable with the subject matter. For instance, in these classes I like to cover topics such as how to draw and interpret graphs, basic problem solving skills, and also introduce some real-world economic examples. Although some of the students with prior knowledge of economics have commented that the first few classes moved too slowly, many of them also found it to be a good review of the material before the more intricate topics were introduced.

Second, I believe that students often lose sight of what they are learning when economic concepts are thrown at them with very little application to the real world. After describing concepts, models, and definitions in detail, I like to return to the same material but with real-life examples incorporated into the lecture. I encourage my students to read newspapers and magazine articles and ask questions about them in class. Furthermore, I ask students their majors at the beginning of the semester so that I can tailor my examples to their academic interests. For instance, in classes where I have political science or journalism majors, I incorporate current policy issues and news polls; and for the physical sciences majors, I incorporate current health care issues into my lectures.

Third, I firmly believe that students should never be afraid to ask questions about the subject matter and should be encouraged to share their opinions during class. When going over problems, rather than to ask students specific answers to questions, I like to have them work on questions in small groups (2-3 people per group) for a few minutes and have them present their answers to the class. I feel that this builds a comfortable atmosphere for students to ask questions, but more importantly allows them to discuss and learn the material as a class. In addition, I have found that when I encourage class discussions it is easier for me to spot and approach the students who may not have a very good grasp of the material.

Finally, I find teaching to be challenging and greatly rewarding. Further, I find that each time I am in the classroom I too am able to expand my own knowledge of economics. I look forward to teaching other courses and am excited to improve my abilities as an instructor.