

Teaching Philosophy

Sourik Banerjee

September 2020

As an economist who has 5 years of teaching-related experiences at the collegiate and graduate level, I believe teaching is a form of art, which should not only deliver the required information to the students, but also encourage them to apply that information to solve real-world problems. A combination of engaging lecture based on relevant topics, conveying their importance to the students, and guiding them to use that knowledge to solve real-world problems should be the pillars of successful learning. Economics is a discipline which is different from the other sciences. Economic concepts cannot be fully replicated in laboratory settings. I have realized students usually struggle to understand the significance of some economic concepts because of this factor. Therefore, I try to relate every economic concept I teach to ongoing global financial and economic events. Also, I try to include many popular cultural references from movies and music to make the lectures more engaging and interesting.

What I teach

As a graduate student in the Department of Economics at University of Nevada, Reno, I have primarily taught Principles of Macroeconomics, Intermediate Macroeconomics and Money & Banking. Moreover, I have also conducted laboratory sessions to teach Stata at the undergraduate level when I served as a teaching assistant for Introduction to Econometrics and taught a three-week long Math Camp to the first year Ph.D. students in Economics. Based on my teaching experience, I think I am qualified to teach any Macroeconomics or Finance

courses at the undergraduate and graduate level, both in in-person as well as online formats. I would also be interested in teaching econometrics and mathematical economics courses in the future.

How I teach

Over the years, my teaching style has gradually shifted from the traditional “sage on the stage” model to the “guide on the side” model, with an extensive use of technology. Completing two certification courses on teaching methods from the American Council of University Educators (ACUE), American Council of Education and University of Nevada, Reno (Teaching with Technology Certificate – Future Faculty) to improve my pedagogical skills has helped me in this regard. In my “Money & Banking” course, my students and I watch “The Big Short” at the end of the semester. The final exam includes many questions from the script of the movie. The general objective of this exercise is to ensure that the students can synthesize all the information they learnt during the course to understand the dynamics of the financial market and how the characters make decisions based on them. I make a conscious effort to link every concept with ongoing economic and financial events using various sources (like “*Yahoo! Finance*” and “*FRED database*”) and articles in every course. I believe this directs the students away from rote-learning to taking the courses to develop their financial literacy and life skills. At the end of each lecture, the students have access to all the lecture notes, presentations as well as articles and data pertaining to the topics covered.

To assess the students’ understanding of the relevant topics, I assign weekly quizzes and assignments which focus primarily on application-based questions to develop their critical thinking skills. The assignments also bring in aspects of real-time data so that the students can relate the course material to everyday life and develop their analytical skills.

Stress plays a major role in students’ lives during the semesters. I make a conscious effort to take that into account while planning my courses by providing them with a detailed course syllabus at the beginning of the semester and including an aspect of “freedom to choose”.

There are usually two evenly spaced midterm exams in my courses, and a final exam at the end of the semester. The students get the option of not appearing for any one of the exams if 90% of the students in the course complete and submit the official course evaluations at the end of the semester. If this condition is met, then I replace the minimum score (which is 0 if a student chooses not to take an exam) they obtained among the three exams with the maximum score they obtained. I also drop the lowest scoring assignment as well as a couple of lowest scoring quizzes to provide them with opportunities to rectify their mistakes in case they miss an assignment or a quiz. My course syllabus clearly mentions the deadlines of every assignment and quiz to be issued over the duration of the course. I believe these factors significantly reduce the stress of the students and allow them to plan the semester more efficiently.

How I measure my effectiveness

To ensure that the design of the course is aligned with the expected learning outcomes and professional goals of the students in the course, I conduct a brief survey at the beginning of the semester. The survey allows me to rethink the efficacy of the course plan by gathering information about the general distribution of the class in terms of the students' academic backgrounds and career plans. Moreover, I use the responses to develop an interpersonal relationship with the students over the semester by learning their names and their backgrounds. This is an effective technique which I learnt during the ACUE certification course. To determine the quality of the course and make relevant changes if necessary, at an early stage, I conduct an anonymous survey after the first midterm exam. It has questions ranging from what the students like the least and the most about the course to the improvements they want to tailor the course towards their expected learning outcomes. This approach adds more flexibility to my course and establishes a trustworthy relationship between my students and myself. It also allows me to identify the mistakes, continually improve the course, be creative and develop new teaching techniques over time.