

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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It has been my privilege to teach five semesters of two different courses during my time at the University of Houston. I am an effective and passionate teacher; I won the Economics Department Graduate Student Teaching Award in 2019. My goal as an instructor is always to engage students in critical thinking above all else, regardless of the course content. A healthy respect for inclusion is key for students to engage in critical thinking in the classroom; students of diverse backgrounds approach problems in diverse ways. Students must be understood and respected to share their input and opinions, risking vulnerability in doing so. The commitment to respect and inclusion is key to my teaching philosophy.

I strive to foster a culture of respect, curiosity, and security in the classroom. Students who are afraid of looking foolish in front of classmates or in front of their instructor do not voice their opinions or questions. Such shame-induced silence is profoundly harmful to the learning of the silent student, and to all students in the class. Questions not asked early in a course compound, and leave a student unsure of where to begin if and when they do seek help. When a student withholds input, other students and the instructor are deprived of the student's point of view, their experiences, their interests. This is especially detrimental when students of historically underrepresented or oppressed groups do not feel safe to speak their minds. For these reasons, creating a classroom environment in which students feel respected and secure is of paramount importance. Without such a space, any learning that takes place will be incomplete, any perspectives gained under-informed.

For students to feel comfortable providing input in class, the entire class must be engaged. To encourage engagement, I have recently adopted elements of an "inside-out" approach to teaching. An inside-out system emphasizes activity-based in-class learning; in an inside-out class, students use class time to work on problems and do the work of the class, and watch lectures outside of class. I do not fully turn my classes inside out. Rather, I record 20-30 minute video lectures which I require students to watch prior to covering material in class so that they are familiar with the concepts that will be covered in the corresponding class, and spend the first part of class discussing the material with them. I always emphasize ties to students' lives and current events in these discussions. Typically, when discussing the material and how it connects to something in the news or something from their own lives, I will attempt to

write a relevant problem as I would a test question, with help from the class, and solve it with the class. A student once told the class of an experience he had playing a game with friends, in which three or more players start with one hundred dollars, and simultaneously choose to give an amount of money between zero and one hundred dollars. The player with the most money at the end of the game loses. The student attempted to use principles of game theory to solve the game in the moment, and as a class, we solved the game after he described it to us. I find such exercises are useful, as they are much more engaging than fictional scenarios for students in the class. After the discussion portion of class is over (I structure it so that it usually takes around one-half to two-thirds the time), the students spend the rest of class working on relevant assigned problems, while I float around to help students that request it. This system has been effective in my mind, and student feedback in the one in-person semester in which I was able to implement it reflected that.

Economics is an inherently interdisciplinary science, since economics is, in essence, the study of human decision-making. Economics has implications in health science, education, labor settings, sports, to name a few. A robust understanding of economic principles must also be informed by mathematics. This is what appealed to me about economics as an undergraduate; it is useful and important in the real world, can be seen all around, but is complex and technically intricate, requires flexible thinking and mathematical aptitude. An interdisciplinary approach is useful in all subjects, but especially so in teaching economics. My emphasis on student input ensures that students are able to approach the subject matter I teach from wherever they are most comfortable, and through whatever lens makes the most sense to them.

The relationship an instructor has with his students can be an extraordinarily enriching part of teaching; I believe that a mutually respectful relationship with a healthy level of empathy is crucial for student success. Students must feel safe, but they also must feel respected. It is important to remember that students are whole, multi-faceted people, and that as an instructor, it is imperative to be sensitive and welcoming to their needs. I am always willing to put in the additional effort necessary to accommodate students that need accommodation above and beyond what is typical. I have worked with students with diverse life situations and needs. I strive to ensure that my students feel respected and valued by me; I currently maintain relationships with many former students.

I have taught two courses during my short teaching career, Principles of Microeconomics and Intermediate Microeconomics. The former of these was relatively structured, with a textbook and course format and online homework shell structure already available to graduate student instructors. I developed the latter course myself, choosing a textbook, which material would be covered, crafting my own lectures, and creating my own homework problems and exams. I deeply enjoyed the experience of

teaching both classes. My research interests primarily lie in public economics, and public education in particular; I would be especially effective in and grateful for opportunities to teach Public Economics courses.

My teaching ratings reflect my effectiveness as an instructor. Across two semesters teaching Principles of Microeconomics - my first two semesters teaching any course - I received an average rating of 3.7/5 in response to the prompt "The overall teaching effectiveness of this instructor is:", increasing my score from one semester to the next. Across two in-person semesters teaching Intermediate Microeconomics, I received an average rating of 4.2/5 in response to the same prompt, receiving a 4.67 in my first inside-out semester. My most recent semester teaching was Spring 2020, in which the class transitioned from face-to-face to virtual mid-semester due to the spread of COVID-19, and my rating and teaching effectiveness suffered; I received a 3.22 effectiveness rating, my lowest, but a rating that still reflects a majority of students rating my effectiveness average or better. I am confident in my ability to teach virtually effectively after others have graciously allowed me to sit in on their classes to observe them teaching. In response to the prompt, "The instructor encouraged student participation, questions, and discussion as the class size allowed", I have received an average rating of 4.28, and in response to the prompt "The instructor encouraged critical thinking and evaluation of ideas and evidence", I have received an average rating of 4.14. Inclusivity and security in the classroom are of particular importance to me, and I have successfully made students feel included and safe throughout my teaching career.; in response to the prompt, "This instructor's demonstration of respect for students is:", I have received an average score of 4.51. Below is a selection of quotes from former students given anonymously; these quotes reflect my strengths and some of the attributes I aspire to as an instructor.

"The class was very interesting because the students could bounce questions to the professor and he would respond instantly and think it through with us." (Fall 2017)

"I liked that he always helped us with questions, we were never scared to ask questions." (Fall 2017)

"Being allowed to ask as many questions without being ignored or just give a weak explanation. He actually took time to make sure you understood a concept if you asked about it." (Spring 2018)

"He is very generous and makes sure we ask questions. Makes us think and makes sure we're all on the same page." (Spring 2019)

"He was very proficient, friendly throughout the course which made it easier to work through. Overall, I had an outstanding time with him. Also, when life hit me, I went to speak with him. I expected to receive typical criticism like I've heard many times

before from other professors, but he was compassionate and caring to my situation. I appreciated my time with Mr. Labadie.” (Summer 2019)

“Professor Labadie is a great professor who gives his students a chance to succeed and is well prepared and knowledgeable in the subject matter.” (Summer 2019)

“Will respects and cares about his students and their learnings, and this was clear. He encouraged questions and explained things in detail many times if needed.” (Spring 2020)

I look forward to continuing to grow as a teacher, learning from my students. Already, after only five semesters of experience, I have learned a great deal, and grown immensely. I have become more effective, and in turn, teaching has become more rewarding. I enjoy teaching undergraduates, and I hope to do it for a long time.