Statement of Teaching Philosophy for Daniel Weinberg

My first exposure to economics was in my Advanced Placement Macroeconomics class during my junior year of high school. The course opened my eyes. I began learning definitions and understanding concepts, and realized that economic reasoning and intuition are part of our lives. In many ways, the discipline formalizes and crystallizes ideas with which we are all familiar. I found economics intuitively appealing and I loved it because it gave me another lens through which to understand the world.

As an economics instructor, my main goal is to instill in my students the enthusiasm for economics that I enjoy. In order to achieve this goal, each student must understand the economic concepts covered and see the presence of economic reasoning in everyday life. I employ a number of different strategies to realize these objectives. Lectures and readings are important parts of my courses. I thoroughly cover theoretical models in class, and students are also expected to read on their own to supplement the lectures. I understand that different students learn differently, so I use intuitive explanation, graphical analysis, and mathematical exposition to explain concepts. My lectures are very organized to facilitate students’ note taking.

Assigned readings include the course’s main textbook as well as scholarly work and current events issues related to class material. Whenever possible, I take into account students’ interests in deciding upon supplementary readings and applications of economic concepts. For example, I taught health economics during the fall 2008 semester, which coincided with the end of the presidential race. Many students were eager to learn about the health care proposals of Senators McCain and Obama. I thus assigned readings about the candidates’ health platforms and I presented the economic underpinnings of each plan. Short videos of expert panel discussions on the pros and cons of each plan were helpful as well and stimulated class discussion.

Students’ grades are diversified across a number of different evaluation media, including problem sets, exams, class participation, and writing assignments. In each case, I make my expectations explicit and grade fairly. Problem sets reinforce material I cover in class and frequently extend it. Also, they assist students with preparation for further evaluation. Exams consist of several question types, including multiple choice, short answer, essays, and problems. Another type of assignment emphasizes writing and critical thinking: I require that students find a recent periodical article to which they apply economic concepts, either as a critique of the writer’s opinion or to make explicit the economic underpinnings of the opinion or phenomenon described.

Personal interaction is another important facet of my teaching style. I make myself available during regular office hours and make appointments with students who cannot attend those office hours. I encourage students to ask questions in class and bring up issues and observations they feel are related to the subject at hand. During lectures, particularly when presenting a new model, I ask for questions and then observe a lengthy pause, rather than continuing to lecture within a few seconds. This enables a concept to “sink in” so that students can figure out what it is they do not understand and ask questions accordingly. This strategy is very helpful in indicating what my students require from me in order to master the material I am presenting.

My main goals as a teacher are to convey economic concepts and emphasize their relevance to the wider world. This is what has always driven my love for the discipline, and I hope that I am successful in encouraging in my students an intellectual curiosity and a desire to understand the world using economic intuition.