

Teaching Philosophy

I have had the opportunity to teach three courses for the Economics Department at Michigan State University. When I first started, I received the excellent advice to “be student-centric, not instructor-centric.” The more I teach, the more I understand what it means to have a student-centric approach to teaching. Inexperienced instructors tend to think about themselves (How do I sound? Am I teaching the material well? Am I interesting?) as opposed to thinking about the students (What do the students hear? What are they comprehending and struggling with? Are the students engaged?). After teaching for a few semesters, I am comfortable implementing a student-centric approach in the classroom, and I use it to guide how I develop course content, communicate with students, and design assessments.

My student-centric approach to teaching begins immediately when the semester starts. I ask each student their personal and professional interests, and I think about ways to incorporate their interests into the course material. For example, I had multiple students in my Economics of Education class express an interest in learning more about the schooling systems in other countries, so I organized a panel of graduate students from Mexico, Italy, and China to speak to the class about their experiences. I also weave economics publications into the class which have clear real-world applications so students see how they might use the theories and models we learn to answer important questions. Furthermore, I intentionally highlight the work of economists from underrepresented groups so every student can see someone like themselves participating in the economics profession. These actions increase student engagement and help students learn how they can apply the material to their lives beyond the class.

Another way I embrace a student-centric approach to teaching is by providing multiple opportunities and channels for students to share their opinions on the course structure and course content. Shortly after the semester starts, I ask students for anonymous feedback on the class, and I adjust the remainder of the semester to incorporate their feedback. This short activity allows me to make small tweaks to the course delivery that improve the student experience. In smaller classes, I dedicate a significant portion of my lectures asking students questions and facilitating discussion among students. This helps me quickly diagnose how well students understand the material and identify what I need to spend more time on teaching. It also gives students an opportunity to reflect on economic theories, modeling assumptions, and empirical results and share with other students how their past experiences shape their interpretation of the material. Not only does this benefit the student who participates, it demonstrates to the entire class the importance of considering diverse backgrounds and worldviews when communicating with others. In larger classes, I will use iClickers or other polling technologies to frequently engage with students. I will also divide students into smaller groups to share their perspectives and discuss the material.

The final way I bring a student-centric approach to my teaching is by designing problem sets and exams that further student learning in addition to assessing it. I assign problem sets weekly which reinforce the course material through repetition and guide students through more difficult concepts. For example, one of the problem sets of my Economics of Education class helps students calculate state foundation grants and power equalization grants for schools. After working through the derivations themselves, students experience first-hand how these grant schemes create different property tax incentives for localities. When it comes to exams, I want students to spend their time studying the important concepts instead of (incorrectly) guessing, so I provide students a full practice mid-term and final exam and devote class time to reviewing the answers. By setting clear expectations and reinforcing the material through repetition, students better learn the material, and the assessments are more accurate signals of their comprehension.