

Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Interests – Andrew Ewing

Teaching Philosophy

“...economic issues pose the same questions that are posed to us in many of our daily activities and that we almost always answer sensibly and correctly.”

--Daniel Hamermesh, *Economics is Everywhere*

The joy that I get from teaching economics is not in the difficulty of the material or from trying to get students to draw graphs and solve equations. The joy comes from being challenged to convince my students that they already knew the answers to all of my questions before the first day of class. If economics truly is the study of human behavior, then all I can offer my students is commentary on how they already behave. True, most of my students have never owned a business other than a lemonade stand and few have really thought about international trade other than noting that their clothes were manufactured in another country, but the core economic analysis at the heart of these issues is the same core economic analysis that they use in everyday decision-making. My undergraduate mentor once told me, “If a physicist went on television and made a statement about how atoms behave, non-physicists would just take her word for it. If an economist went on television and made a statement about how humans behave, non-economists would trip over themselves to offer their own commentary and express their own views. And that’s the way it should be.”

This notion that I am just revealing truths that students already know drives my approach to teaching. I try not to be the instructor that just writes definition after definition on the chalkboard only to have my students forget everything they have learned a few weeks after the final exam. While a certain amount of memorization is necessary to advance their knowledge in the field of economics, I have increasingly used a “problem-based learning” approach. I have found my students retain concepts much longer simply because they have uncovered that knowledge from their own experiences rather than just cramming more material into their heads. A typical class of mine will involve both lecture and small group work. I have found that this is an effective way of not only presenting the material, but also ensuring that my students understand it and can use it after the class is finished.

In future classes, I would like to add more classroom experiments to both break up the lectures and to further this idea that students can intuitively reach many conclusions from their own experiences. I currently use a classroom experiment that doubles as both a teaching tool and as an icebreaker. On the first day of my Principles classes, I bring an assortment of candy, vegetables or rice cakes, and most recently (clean) gym socks. What the students do not know is that I have already made a “pseudo-random” allocation of these goods on my first-day attendance sheet. Some students will get a lot of candy, some students will get nothing, and some get gym socks. As I go through the roll call, I make the distributions and instruct my students to hold onto their allocation until further notice. Once the roll call is finished, I instruct them to get up out of their seats and make trades until they can no longer find someone that would willingly trade with them. After the students physically participate in this experiment, they can easily see the tradeoff between efficiency and equity play out in front of them. They seem to retain the concept much better than if they just read definitions on the chalkboard or read it in a textbook; this experiment has served its purpose as a reference example much better than any dry, “chalk and talk” example ever could.

The interaction between my students and me has also become a great motivator for my research involving students' evaluations of teachers. I often find myself referring to my research in class as a way to solicit interpretations of my hypotheses from actual students, but I also find that my students become enthusiastic about different, non-traditional applications of the tools they are learning. When the opportunity presents itself, I turn my classroom into a forum for showing my students what economists actually do. I have sometimes found that the most influential comments on my research come from my undergraduate students, and several of my students mention after the class is finished that these "outside of the textbook" applications were their favorite part of the course.

A key realization that I was forced to make a long time ago is that I will never be the perfect economics teacher. This realization is simple and obvious, but I think it is a very important one to mention because it continues to shape my teaching philosophy. In every class I teach, regardless of how much I prepare or try to anticipate students' questions, there is inevitably a question that makes me stop and think. I think about the real meaning behind some of the concepts I thought I mastered, or I think about the best way to present the material in each unique class. The learning-by-teaching process that I go through in each class makes me want to teach for years to come.

Teaching Experience and Interests

I have been fortunate enough to have a wide variety of teaching experiences in my short career, not just between different classes, but also at different colleges. At the University of Washington, I have taught (both independently and as a TA) *Introduction to Microeconomics*, *Introduction to Macroeconomics*, and *Intermediate Microeconomics*. In the winter quarter of 2009, I will teach both *Labor Market Analysis* and a 300-student large lecture *Intro to Micro* course. At Seattle University, I have taught principles classes; at Seattle Central Community College, I have taught both principles classes and *Business and Economic Statistics*. Perhaps one of my more interesting teaching experiences came from stepping out of my comfort zone at my alma mater, McDaniel College, and teaching *Macroeconomic Theory* and *Money and Financial Markets*.

While I am open to teaching and developing many different classes, as evidenced by my flexibility at McDaniel College, my teaching interests lie mostly in applied microeconomics. My primary teaching interests are Economics of Education, Labor Economics, Principles and Intermediate theory courses, and seminar courses for majors. I am also interested in teaching Statistics and Econometrics, Natural Resource and Environmental Economics, and Game Theory. Although outside my primary fields, I would also be interested in developing courses in the History of Economic Thought and Economic History of the U.S. and Europe.