

Statement on Teaching Philosophy

Last year I taught four sections of two classes. I taught Principles of Economics in the fall, learning the ins and outs of Holy Cross alongside many first-year students and how to best manage the extra fifty-minute class period. In the Spring, I developed a new, 300-level elective on immigration, which covered why people migrate, the impacts of migration, and the role of immigration policy around the world.

As an alumna of a liberal arts college, I know how valuable it is for students to have an approachable instructor. With the small class sizes at Holy Cross, I have been able to really get to know my students and make the classroom a comfortable place for questions, mistakes, and opinions. From the beginning of class, I encourage students to come to office hours and have provided both in-person and online office hours. One thing I noticed this year is that students really preferred in-person office hours so halfway through the fall semester I adjusted my online-only office hours to hybrid, allowing students to join either in my office or online during that window. This flexible option was especially useful for students who preferred in-person meetings but had to travel for sports or family responsibilities on occasion. I want my students to get to learn from each other so I include a lot of small group work in class. I roam the classroom checking in with each group which helps the shy students share their ideas and it gives all students a chance to gather their thoughts before sharing with the larger class. The various slides shared on the Canvas page include examples of practice problems, discussion questions, and reading summaries which all begin as small group or pair activities. I also strive to be mindful of students' different backgrounds and preparation for college classes. I provide incomplete versions of the slides to students before class so those that are more confident when they've seen what we're going to do in class have the opportunity to prepare. I also chose the cheapest version of the required materials including one free textbook for Principles and non-fiction, general audience book for the Economics of Immigration.

Economics, especially the introductory courses, can be alienating to students when the theory we teach doesn't match their lived experiences or lacks vital nuances. For example, in the Principles course, a number of students had experience working minimum wage jobs. We worked together to discuss what economic theory predicts happens to labor markets when the government increases the minimum wage and then discussed other theories and empirical research explaining why increasing the minimum wage often does not increase unemployment, as our model originally predicted. To understand the more complex research on minimum wage policies, my students watch a video at core-econ.org where Professor Arin Dube discusses his own research on market power and wages.

Students were most engaged with lessons where they were able to evaluate their own life experiences using economic theory. One popular topic was discussing the various negative externalities they faced covering everything from a roommate's alarm that goes off too early to polluted lakes and rivers. Similarly, my student's enjoyed discussing the negative impacts of the LiveNation-Ticketmaster monopoly, describing their experiences with expensive concert and sporting event tickets. We discussed monopoly markets in class in week 8 and those slides are available on the Canvas page. In that lecture we also discussed the economic and ethical implications of drug patents which was another monopoly many students were familiar with. In

order to cover material efficiently, I provide students with the slides ahead of class and then fill in the slides with notes and examples during the lecture. I've included both the before and after slides in class but I do not provide the marked-up slides to students. For Principles, I begin with slides that come with the textbook so the definitions are consistent with what the students see in the reading but add practice problems and discussion topics to break up the lecture and incorporate current events. I also tried to take out figures, and took out even more for this current semester, so I could demonstrate drawing the figures slowly in class. They are responsible for taking notes during class whether that is in a notebook or on a tablet but they do not have to scramble to write down definitions and formulas and can instead focus on the intuition and real-world connections during class.

To encourage students to make these real-world connections, approximately every other week my Principles students wrote a "reading response" instead of a traditional problem set where their task was to take lessons from class and connect them to their own experiences. I've included three examples of these assignments and the rubric on the Canvas page.

For upper-level electives, I similarly focused on writing assignments that ask students to engage with the reading and lecture material in new ways. These assignments require students to demonstrate their knowledge from class while also allowing them to pursue the avenues that are most interesting to them. I included examples of these prompts and the grading rubric on the Canvas page. One example is Reading Response Four where students first needed to explain in their own words one of the most common econometric issues when studying migration – that it is difficult to measure the benefits of migration to a migrant because those who migrate are often inherently different than those who don't. For class we studied a paper that uses an experimental design to overcome this issue then develops a model showing that people in rural Bangladesh are unlikely to engage in seasonal migration despite the well-known income gains because they do not want to risk spending precious money upfront in case they do not find a job in the city (Bryan et al. 2014). After students explained the econometric issues, they had to apply their knowledge and suggest a policy that would mitigate this risk and encourage migration in rural Bangladesh. One issue with this assignment was where I asked "what factors may reduce the risk of an unsuccessful migration?" I was expecting students to discuss individual characteristics like higher skills or an existing network but many felt "factors" was a vague term. For next year, I plan to make all the prompts a bit more specific and also shorter so students spend more time on the important parts of the prompt.

These written responses offered students a wider variety of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. In an effort to provide a more inclusive learning environment and meet rising challenges regarding student mental health and stress, I offered a diverse set of smaller assignments in both my introductory courses and upper-level electives, including traditional problem sets in the Principles course and a group presentation in the Economics of Immigration elective. Halfway through the fall semester, my Principles students completed an anonymous survey with a question that asked whether they preferred the problem sets, the reading responses, or both equally. The results were almost exactly tied, which was my hope. Not every student enjoys every assignment but they all had opportunities to showcase their knowledge in their preferred way.

For my principles class I also used exams and quizzes while the Immigration class included two quizzes, a group presentation, and a final research proposal. These provided opportunities to students who prefer more typical economics assessments and also ensured they really understood the material and could demonstrate that in class without notes or the internet. Similar to my approach with homework assignments, I tried offering more, shorter questions on exams so students had many opportunities to show what they knew. I used the question bank provided by the textbook to start and then added my own questions usually based on topics students had struggled with on earlier problem sets to show that they had mastered that material. Going forward, I decided to remove the quizzes in the principles course and add a third exam instead. I allocated only half a class period for a quiz, with the rest of class devoted to lecture. I had quite a few students who were entitled to extra time for in-class assessments. These students ended up missing lecture material or losing out on other parts of their day to complete the quiz.

One issue I encountered with including so many writing assignments was, of course, the improper use of GenerativeAI programs. In my syllabus and on the first day of class, I tell students that they may use AI in appropriate ways with proper citations. To me, this may mean editing the student's own writing for clarity, helping brainstorm ideas that the student will then expand on themselves, formatting a bibliography, or re-explaining a concept from class. I required students cite their AI use following the Purdue OWL's guide and some were quite responsible with their AI use and always cited it correctly. I will take new steps to address improper AI in this upcoming year. In my Principles course and possibly others, I plan to have the students feed one of our writing prompts into an AI program and then they will grade the computer's response using my rubric. In class we will discuss key issues that they may see such as fake citations, vague or overly broad economic claims, and irrelevant information. I hope this both demonstrates to students the major pitfalls of asking AI to write an assignment for them and also familiarizes them with the grading rubric. I also plan to adjust my rubrics to put more weight on lack of clarity and detail, and illogical or unsupported claims, whether those are due to improper AI use or the student's own errors. Students are frequently confronted with headlines and clickbait videos that make grand claims about economic issues without any evidence or economic modeling. Therefore, I plan to demand more from my students on that front in their own writing assignments.

Another way I try to make class engaging and productive is through in class activities and strict participation grades. I grade participation because I want to provide students with another opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge while also encouraging questions and discussion in class. In-class work sometimes includes practice problems to prepare students for tests and problem sets. I often have them work with their neighbors on these problems before letting them raise their hand to ask me when they get stuck. I also try to have students move around the room both to keep them engaged and to work with new classmates. When the room has multiple whiteboards, I'll have students draw out different models we've worked with and then use these models to evaluate a shock (such as what happens to milk prices when ICE raids target New York state dairy farms) or a policy (such as what happens to GDP when the government provides money to promote R&D). I've also used online platforms such as PollEverywhere to give quieter students a chance to answer questions individually and ClassEx which offers free economic strategy games to educators (see ECON399 Week 3 slides and questions on the Canvas page).

Everyone's favorite in class activity is to have a debate. Sometimes, these are fairly informal situations where I present students with a question towards the end of class and give them just a few minutes to think about their opinion and the economic logic behind their answer. For example, in Principles, to understand what economists mean by "market efficiency" and "gains from trade" I ask students to consider the market for kidneys. These slides from week 3 are included on the Canvas page. Most students are instantly uncomfortable with the idea of selling a body part but it helps make the economic concept clear; there are people who desperately need a kidney and there are probably people who would be willing to sell one of their healthy kidneys, so wouldn't they both gain from such an exchange? I ask students whether they think this market should be legal and this is an opportunity for them to explore difficult economic questions and also respect their classmates. I've had students describe moral objections to putting a price on life which gives the class a chance to discuss where economic models fail to address culture, religion, and social norms. Students also quickly come to realize the role economic inequality and injustice would play since someone always notes that it is likely poor people who would sell a kidney. I've also had students say this is fine since we should respect adult's agency and there are clear gains from this exchange. Most importantly, students have the opportunity to listen to each other's opinions and engage respectfully.

In upper-level electives I include more structured debates where students get the question ahead of time and I assign them a position. We then spend about half of class with a more formal debate. For example, in Week 14 of the Economics of Immigration students debated whether immigration helps developing countries (better opportunities for individuals, remittances, new trade networks and business ventures) or harms them (extracting top talent, hurting labor markets). Here each team presents original arguments and offers rebuttals to their opponent's points. A key point of this activity is to use real sources and facts, which students both look up ahead of time and assign a teammate to be researching in the moment. Many students will at first default to their feelings about immigration or a headline they've seen but I do not let them move on to their next point or rebuttal until they present proper evidence. This has been especially fun for quieter students who often take on the role of in-the-moment-researcher but more than once they've had a dramatic eureka moment when they find the statistic or research article that refutes an unsupported claim. So many students enjoyed these debates last year that I plan to hold three instead of two and give them their own grading category next year, which is included on the in-progress syllabus.

I try to focus on in class activities and assignments that will demonstrate learning from class but also prepare students for life beyond the classroom. For example, both the writing assignments and in-class discussions and debates require students to analyze policies or form opinions using evidence. My hope is that this not only helps them read and understand the news they see but also, I expect they will need to present some kind of case or opinion to their boss one day. In week 11 of the Principles class, I modeled doing web-based research in class and then had the students spend an entire short class looking up various data on two countries (slide 41). After gathering this information, students developed a policy plan to promote economic growth in each country. We discussed what a government could reasonably achieve with 500 million dollars and they came up with many interesting and economically sound policies.

In the Economics of Immigration class, the group project provided an opportunity to manage group work and practice their oral communication. I let them pick their own groups which mitigated some of the usual frustration with group work but still a few students were not satisfied with their groupmates' efforts. I explained to students that this is a fairly common part of any job and working with others towards a common goal is an important part of life. A few students also mentioned that they need to present work in their summer internships and appreciated the opportunity to practice and receive feedback in class. I gave each student feedback based on the rubric (included on the Canvas page) after their presentation. I also provided additional feedback on their individual presentation skills over email if they asked. I recognize there is a lot of stress around grades and therefore shared groupwork so next year I am going to reduce the weight of the assignment and will consider an individually graded portion in the future as well. I think the value of the presentation outweighs the frustration but I do not want to make students miserable.

Finally, I would like to incorporate more current events and alternative sources into my lectures and reading assignments. In Economics of Immigration, students primarily read published academic articles but we also used a book from an anthropologist embedded with human smuggling gangs in Mexico. The lecture slides from week 3 demonstrate the lessons from this book. My students really enjoyed this non-fiction but very readable account into a modern issue in international migration. Similarly, in week 6 we discussed climate migration and used a New York Times article that was very readable and had excellent data visualizations, demonstrating the cool things we can do with data as well (linked on Canvas). My students asked for more current events, which I thought we covered through academic articles about current issues but I realize these don't always resonate in the same way with students as popular press articles. In Principles it was a bit easier to incorporate current issues as the reading responses were a bit broader and students could bring in their own interests but still almost all the readings came from two textbooks. Going forward I plan to incorporate more general audience pieces and podcasts to show students how our lessons from class are very relevant to ongoing issues.