

# Teaching Philosophy Statement

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My goal in the classroom is not only to maximize learning. Rather, my over-arching goal as an educator is to increase students' confidence and curiosity. This approach may be surprising given the arguably objective content taught in economics courses. As a student, I found my learning was never limited by professors' teaching abilities, as long as I was curious enough about the topic. However, my learning has absolutely been limited by fear. Experiences as a minority student conditioned me to avoid mistakes at all costs, for fear a slip could cause me or my ideas to be indefinitely mocked, minimized, or underestimated, an experience termed "stereotype threat" in the academic literature<sup>1</sup> This fear made my learning process unnecessarily slow and painful and held me back. To find success as an academic, I have learned to reward effort, persistence, and creativity over perfect performance. By centering these values in my classroom, I promote student success by inspiring effort and engagement through creativity and curiosity.

My first task toward this end is to encourage students to feel comfortable being wrong. Excessive pressure to be "correct" stifles students' curiosity and willingness to test the boundaries of their knowledge and abilities.<sup>2</sup> To encourage this, I record attendance by requiring students to submit one question or comment at the end of each lesson. This normalizes confusion or uncertainty and helps me diagnose common gaps in comprehension, which I revisit at the start of the next class. Moreover, it gives students the opportunity to provide real-time feedback about instructional materials, enabling me to tailor future lessons to their unique learning styles and interests. Further, when students are shy to engage or answer questions, I elicit "wrong-answers-only." We then discuss the reasoning behind each incorrect response, offering students a model of critical problem solving. We arrive at the correct answer together by logically piecing together information we gleaned from analyzing the wrong answers.

My second goal is to leave each student more confident than I found them. My goal is for each student to take pride in their accomplishments, realizing capabilities they may not have thought possible at the beginning of the semester. I achieve this by clearly establishing fixed, high expectations from the outset; I then guide students towards meeting these standards by breaking down topics and assignments into manageable components. For example, in my capstone seminar, the primary assignment involves writing a 15-20 page Independent Research Project within only six weeks. Many students are overwhelmed by the idea of this task, so I decompose the project into four smaller pieces: a Reflective Essay, a Project Topic Summary, an Annotated Bibliography, and a Project Analysis. This structure breaks the final paper into digestible sections, helping students to focus on the unique purpose and skill sets used in each. Students receive peer and instructor feedback on each section and compile their revisions into the Introduction, Literature Review, and Analysis sections of their final paper at the end of the semester. Students deliver a 10-15 minute project presentation and

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<sup>1</sup>Spencer, S. J., Logel, C., & Davies, P. G. (2016). Stereotype Threat. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 67(1), 415–437. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-073115-103235>

<sup>2</sup>Cerbin, B. (2019, November 5). Student fear and mistrust. *Taking Learning Seriously*. <https://takinglearningseriously.com/barriers-to-learning/student-fear-and-mistrust/>

are encouraged to use their slides as an outline for their final paper. The presentation also helps students develop transitions between disparate sections so their final paper reads as one cohesive piece.

Finally, as a math-intensive social science, economics courses attract a wide variety of students with diverse interests and skill sets. It is my responsibility to engage and challenge students across the spectrum of academic disciplines, from engineering majors seeking to fulfill humanities requirements, to sociology majors who excel in conceptualizing broader contexts but may struggle with math. Particularly post-COVID, many students struggle with basic math and are obviously self-conscious of this skill deficit. To address this, I introduce scaffolded practice questions before progressing to more difficult question types. By providing both mathematical and contextual scaffolding, this pedagogical approach prepares both sets of students to successfully answer more difficult, open-ended questions. An additional benefit is students are able to show what they know, enabling me to meet them where they are and provide support from there.

The effectiveness of this pedagogical strategy is evident from my teaching evaluations. Evaluations from students have remained high and continue to increase with experience. As an instructor, my overall teaching effectiveness score increased from a 4.6/5 in my first course, to a 4.9/5 in my second. As a teaching assistant, several students attribute their success in large Introduction to Microeconomics courses to my recitation instruction, suggesting that these high evaluations are driven by the quality of instruction in my classroom, not ease of the course overall. My exceptional instruction is also evidenced by my recent nomination for the Elizabeth Baranger Teaching Award.

Although my teaching philosophy derives from personal experience, I am passionate about revising my approach and instructional methods as I learn more. I took a semester-long teaching seminar through the University of Pittsburgh Economics Department featuring guest lectures from the University Center for Teaching and Learning. We covered innovative uses of technology in the classroom, learning management system integration for large classes, and field standards for syllabus design, lesson planning, and many other relevant topics. In addition, the following are a sample of voluntary workshops I attended through the Center: Best Practices in Online Teaching, Fundamentals of Teaching Inclusively, New to School: Supporting First-Generation Students, and Grading with Canvas.

In conclusion, I am a passionate educator with skills to teach small or large lectures consisting of students from diverse demographic, economic, and academic backgrounds. In addition to teaching Introduction to Microeconomics or Macroeconomics, I am especially excited to teach and design courses related to public economics, labor economics, or economic history. I also have a writing-intensive senior capstone on gender economics prepared, and am qualified to teach Intermediate Microeconomics or Macroeconomics and undergraduate econometrics.