Teaching Statement

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My teaching experience is based on teaching Introduction to Microeconomics and assisting instructors in teaching undergraduate Economics classes. As an instructor and a teaching assistant I strived to develop open communications with students in class and during office hours, and encouraged students of different abilities and interests to become involved in the class. Most of the students that take Introduction to Microeconomics are not Economics majors. Some of them are planning to enter Business School while others take the introductory Economics class as a social science requirement. The students in the Introduction to Microeconomics class differ not only in their interests and goals, but in their abilities. Some students are well-versed in Mathematics while others are not comfortable with Algebra. There are differences in the abilities of students to apply abstract concepts to real situations, and in their abilities to express ideas clearly. My goal as a teacher was to engage all students on their own level and provide challenges that can be overcome by all students that make an effort.

One example of my attempt to engage students and interest them in Economics was the news assignment. I got the idea for this assignment from an undergraduate course that I attended at the Ohio State University. Each week the students were required to submit a short assignment based on a recent article of their choice on an economic subject. In first one or two paragraphs the students summarized the main points of the article. In the last paragraph they described how the article relates to an Economics concept that we learned in class. I graded the assignment very leniently, and most students who submitted the assignment received 90 – 100 percent. I took off points when the students did not apply concepts learned in class, or applied them incorrectly. Many of the essays submitted each week were original and thoughtful. I feel that the news assignment increased student interest in the subject and gave them a sense of accomplishment that encouraged them to study.

Over the course of teaching I tried different styles of instruction. I started using Power Point presentations, but switched to using the blackboard during most of the classes. I noticed that with Power Point presentations, even when I knew the material very well and had interesting points to add I tended to read the text off the slides and explain it. This routine became monotonous, and the students did not seem interested or engaged. Power Point presentations allowed me to cover a lot of material. However, they did not encourage student involvement, and I was concerned that the students were not learning as much as they could during the classes. I started using the blackboard, resorting to Power Point only to cover the material that did not involve graphs or problem-solving. I was able to cover less material. However, the classes became more engaging for my students as well as for me. One of the advantages of using the blackboard was that I received feedback from my students. I was able to ask questions and receive answers. There was genuine debate, such as when a student was sure of his or her solution, but it did not match the solution that I presented on the board.
When I used the blackboard and talked to students directly, without the text written on the Power Point slide to interfere, I was able to see if the students understood a concept or if it was beyond them. For instance, when I discussed the demand curve as a plot of a demand function I noticed that many students did not understand this. I then went through the process of plotting an algebraic expression of a demand curve on a graph, and later included a similar exercise in a homework assignment. If I had used Power Point this gap in student understanding would have been missed.

Even in large classes a personal and engaging learning atmosphere can be attempted. One of the tools that I used to create this atmosphere was in-class problem solving. I wrote a problem on the board and gave the students time to solve it. I found that most students made an effort to solve the problem even when it was not graded. Grading numerous assignments is not always realistic for an instructor of a large class. The 5-minute break allowed the students to think about what they learned and see if they can apply it to a problem. I gave a solution to the problem and was able to engage the attention of some of the students who were not attentive before and did not know how to solve the problem.

In addition to in-class engagement, homework is another essential component of effective learning. I created problems for students to solve at home. Some problems were easy, while others were challenging for most students. I posted the solutions online and let the students know that some problems on the exams would be very similar to the homework assignments. The time that the students spent at home working on the problems allowed them to assimilate economic concepts that do not come to students intuitively.

My exams were a combination of multiple choice questions based on economic concepts, and written problems. Multiple choice questions tested the knowledge of the class material, and written problems required in-depth understanding and problem-solving skills. I graded the written problems based on whether the students described the steps taken to solve the problem, whether their graph is correct, and finally, whether the students got the correct answer. The written problems rewarded students for displaying their understanding of the problem, not only the correct answer. Writing the solutions to the problems in class and at home allows the students to exercise their creativity even in the rigid bounds of the problem. I believe that creativity is a key ingredient in learning. By creating something, be it a solution to a tricky problem, or a thoughtful essay, students make the knowledge they acquire in class their own. Such knowledge can then be used in solving problems and writing papers for other college classes and applied to situations outside the class environment.