

# Teaching Statement

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I have been a student of economics for eight years and an instructor of economics for four years. From those experiences, I have drawn the following three tenets of teaching economics.

- *Story-telling is an effective method for teaching economics.*
- *Integrating debates in an economics class prompts students to think critically.*
- *Economics is a way of thinking that can benefit students across a variety of majors.*

Economics is a part of everyone's life whether he realizes it or not. When I teach a new idea or concept, I try my best to illustrate it by telling a story of my own. I also encourage my students to relate their personal experience to the material they are learning. I believe this is a highly effective teaching method. While making economics more relevant to their daily life, I pique students interest in the subject and prompt them to learn in an intuitive way.

For example, I shared my job searching experience as a college graduate in 2008. Many companies canceled their on-campus recruiting sessions. Some employers decided not to hire non-U.S. citizens to avoid paying visa application fees. I used the story to show how a recession affects the labor market.

In another class, I asked the students whether they knew any family members who had received tax rebates. One student said that her grandparents received a \$600 rebate check and spent the whole amount within a week on a brand new couch. Another student said his parents received a similar rebate but they saved most of the money. After the two stories, I asked the class what the pros and cons of using expansionary fiscal policies during a recession were. The entire class answered: some people would spend the money immediately and help boost the economy; some people would save the extra money, making the policy ineffective.

Integrating debates in an economics class can create a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Debates require a student to understand the topic, form his own opinion, and defend that opinion with reasoning. It is an active way of learning and cultivates the student's critical thinking ability.

As a graduate of Colgate University, I consider myself lucky to have experienced learning in a classroom with typically fewer than 20 students. The small class size offered a perfect environment for intellectual discussions. In one of my favorite economics classes, the professor often wrote down a statement on the blackboard. Then he divided the class into two groups. Each student in the first group was asked to come up with one argument supporting the statement, and the students in the second group were to provide opposing arguments. It was not the most comfortable exercise, since it required sharing my own views in front of others. Nevertheless, it was definitely the most rewarding class. I was not only thinking for myself but learning from my peers.

The classes I taught at The Ohio State University are much bigger and often have 40-50 students. The form of discussion I had at Colgate is no longer feasible. Instead, I ask the

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students who sit in the same row to form a group. I give them a topic that is relevant to the material I have covered, and ask each group to come up with a few supporting causes and counterarguments. I then randomly pick a group and ask one person to read out what they have. I write down those arguments on the blackboard and encourage other students to add more to the list. Some of the topics show up later in exams. One student told me during office hours, "It feels good to see what I said get put on the blackboard and later became an exam question." Another student wrote in the evaluation report, "[the instructor] tries hard to make us think and I learned a lot from the class."

Students who come to an economics class, especially the introductory level courses, have different backgrounds and academic interests. Many of them are not economics majors and are most interested in fields other than economics; however, they can still benefit intellectually from learning economics. I often tell my students that economics is a way of thinking that can be applied broadly.

In a discussion on barter and fiat money, one political science student pointed out that barter could also be used to evade taxes, a usage of barter the textbook had failed to mention. In the Soviet Union, a bank's main task was to collect taxes on cash, so people used barter to avoid going to the bank. In another discussion of scarcity and value, one art history major told the class that the color blue was only used on the clothing of Jesus and Mary in the medieval paintings. It was because blue paint was so scarce that it was only considered appropriate to paint the clothing of Jesus and Mary.

It is fascinating to see how students of various backgrounds try to apply economics concepts to their own fields of specialization. This is one reason why I particularly enjoy teaching the introductory level courses where the student body is the most diverse.

Teaching is a learning process. I have been improving my teaching skills little by little from reading my students' evaluations to observing the class reaction to every new method I try. My three tenets of teaching summarize the most effective way to teach economics that I have found so far.