

Statement of Teaching

Luc Clair

I have been fortunate in my life to have studied under great professors who conveyed both simple and complex materials in a lucid and compelling manner. I base my own approach to teaching on a mixture of my most favoured pedagogical characteristics from past instructors. While these instructors differed in many ways, they all demonstrated a high level of preparation, which I believe to be a key to their success as effective educators. When it comes to teaching, being prepared not only translates to a full understanding of the material but also how best to teach the material in a logical order and the correct medium for presenting the material (e.g. seminar, lecture, powerpoint, blackboard, video, and/or discussion). Being prepared promotes an open learning environment as it allows students to ask a broad range of questions, leading to engaging discussions. Questioning the material provides feedback and a method for auditing one's understanding. A prepared teacher is more flexible and presents topics in ways that facilitate student engagement.

Other aspects of teaching I incorporate are assessments that stimulate independent thinking and review of pre-requisite concepts. Teaching also provides external benefits for understanding economics, which can be translated to students through collaboration.

Student Engagement

Student engagement cultivates learning as the students' attention will be focused on the coursework and, by increasing interest in a topic, will encourage independent study. Engagement is nurtured by forming a connection between economic theory and the student. By incorporating real-world examples into lesson plans, students can relate to economic theory and develop an intuitive understanding of the principal ideas. Also, by connecting students with practitioners in the community, from government officials to business leaders to civil society leaders, students get a better sense of the applications of economic concepts in the real-world. This is easier to achieve in small classes as the types of assignments and discussions can better accommodate student participation and examples can be tailored to that particular audience. As a TA for *Introductory Macroeconomics* for six semesters, a course with an annual enrolment of over 2,400 students, I observed several methods for encouraging student engagement for large classes. The professors for this course regularly introduced innovative assessment methods that encourage student participation and interest in economic theory.

Assessments for Independent Thinking

Carefully designed assessments encourage independent thinking and provide experience for the real-world. As educators, we wish not to develop economists who can simply

restate theory but can apply these concepts to research that benefits all of society. I like assessments that are organized such that students show (1) they understand the basics; (2) they understand more complex material; and (3) they can apply what they have learned to a new problem. Challenging students to synthesize the concepts they have learned in order to solve a problem fosters creativity and resourcefulness. Furthermore, assessments that mirror real-world assignments help prepare students for employment in all areas, including government, private sector, and academia.

Review of Pre-requisite Concepts

My approach to learning is sometimes similar to my search for a lost item: I start with the last place I had it. 'It' in this case is an understanding; I go to where I last had a solid understanding of the material and work my way forward. Many students who visit the economics help centre at McMaster University lack an understanding of the underlying mathematical methods or do not possess the foundational concepts in economics to properly solve problems. I find reviewing the supporting material provides these students with the ability to better solve problems in a variety of cases. It helps to clarify the logical connection between the theoretical concepts in economics and the quantitative tools used to support them. Some students who have strong quantitative skills have trouble grasping normative concepts, while other students may possess economic intuition but struggle with mathematics. In a classroom setting, reviewing the pre-requisite concepts allows students to start with a more equal distribution of knowledge.

External Benefits from Teaching

I truly enjoy teaching. I derive a great deal of fulfillment from helping others gain new knowledge and providing them with the tools to solve future problems. Teaching often results in a positive externality as helping others navigate through material has the added benefit of giving the instructor a better understanding of economic theory. Many revelations I have had in my own studies came from tutoring other students. For example, by drawing on lessons of different concepts to help others understand a particular problem, as the teacher, you begin to form connections between topics and develop a greater understanding of economic theory. These connections are then passed on to others through teaching. By grouping students with varying levels of economic knowledge, students can help fill the gaps in each others' understandings, offer new insights, and identify underlying connections between economic concepts.