

Statement of Teaching Philosophy – Zachary W. Richards

Teaching is perhaps the most significant way that one can impact the life of another. While it involves passing on the teacher's thoughts and experiences, its value is greatest when those being taught are also simultaneously developing the ability to think critically and expand their own thoughts. To be effective in this regard, the teacher must find ways to provide an environment where students are presented with stimulating and relevant material, able to communicate freely and openly with the instructor, and encouraged to succeed.

The field of economics is particularly useful for developing a student's ability to analyze the world around him. Its basic theories are derived from logic and reason. Once recognized, it becomes evident that these theories have direct applications to decisions we make and things we observe going on around us every day. An effective teacher is able to equip students with these analytical tools by first illustrating the fundamental concepts and then challenging the students to apply them to increasingly more complex issues.

In order to communicate basic concepts effectively, the presentation must be clear, accessible, and given in a variety of formats in order to accommodate students with differing learning styles. I try to present all concepts both visually and orally. As most economists do, I believe that a graph or an equation speaks a thousand words. However, I understand the benefit of an accompanying verbal description with an appropriate level of detail. For many students, graphs and equations appear intimidating. I believe that many of the struggles students encounter in economics classes can be avoided by presenting the same material in multiple formats.

Laying out classroom material in and of itself is not sufficient. Much of what a teacher must do is find ways to actively engage the student, capturing his or her attention. I do this, in part, through enthusiasm and creative thinking. I do not want students to become passive information receivers. I want them to come into class expecting to experience something new. My most effective teachers have been those who were able to combine imagination and rigor. They were able to present material in a thought-provoking fashion. I want to follow their example and be a teacher who is known as challenging and having high expectations, but fair and effective. Economics is a field that constantly evolves. As such, I believe that the classroom must not be allowed to become intellectually stagnant. To avoid this, I commit myself to keeping up with the most current issues and supplementing the traditional knowledge base with new ideas. In this way, research is a compliment to effective teaching.

Learning is a dynamic process, the success of which depends on a number of things outside of the course content. It requires two-way communication and cooperation, which itself depends on trust and mutual respect. I strongly encourage class participation and welcome pedagogically useful debate. I strive to conduct myself in a professional, yet personable and approachable, manner at all times. I expect my students to do the same. I try to make myself as accessible to my students as possible. I believe that this shows students that I am taking a stake in their education and am genuinely interested in their success. I also look forward to taking the role of an advisor, where I can interact with students outside of the classroom, strengthening the tie between academics and real life.

To become a more effective instructor, I want to continue to learn, through my research, my colleagues, and my students. Teachers themselves are not exempt from the learning process. I look forward to building professional relationships with those who share my enthusiasm for the field of economics and am excited to become a part of a community where ideas are shared and cultivated. Lastly, I hope, and expect, to learn as much from my students as they learn from me.