

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Garret Christensen

I believe that economics and statistics are powerful tools to analyze nearly all aspects of human behavior, but that mathematical proofs are much less important to nearly all students than interesting hands-on applications. This belief guides how I teach my students. Building and testing economic models can be useful in understanding everything from standard policy topics like the returns to education or the effects of a specific environmental regulation to less frequently analyzed topics such as who a professional sports team should draft or why the film industry makes so many R-rated movies when they're far less profitable on average than movies for kids. I bring a variety of topics to class because I want to be an excited and engaging teacher who shows his students that they can use the statistical and logical tools from economics on any topic they choose. If my students take only one course in economics, then I hope they will be able to understand not only how supply and demand work in the Fed's open market operations, but also how they work in their own everyday decision making. If they major in economics or take econometrics from me, I would hope that students are able to spend less time learning the math skills to prove certain properties of the OLS estimator, and more time learning how to tell the difference between correlation and causality in studies they come across in the media, or doing their own basic statistical analysis. And if they plan to go on and do research, I would hope they learn from me that they can research almost anything that excites them.

To meet this goal of teaching students the wide range and applicability of economics, I find out my students' interests and bring in examples from those areas. In classes with lots of student athletes, I make sure to mention the constant struggle over collective bargaining agreements in professional sports when discussing the indeterminate result of a market with a monopsony and a monopoly. But even if I'm constantly thinking of ways to share economic analysis of current events with my students, I need to do more than just lecture to help the students learn to do the same. So I ask students to bring in their own related news articles to share with the class, and I always encourage students to find something they consider truly interesting (NGO aid work with refugees? the newest Apple product?).

In addition to giving humorous lectures and helping students see how economics applies to the news, I hope to accommodate the learning styles of all my students, not just those who understand my pop-culture allusions because they have seen the same outdated episodes of *The Simpsons* as I have. To do this, I ask students to solve problems in small groups or to explain concepts to the whole class. I like the objectivity that mathematical problems bring to economics (solving for equilibrium price and quantity, taking first order conditions and solving Lagrangians, and constantly looking to the most recent empirical results to see if the data lines up with the theory), but I hope to strike a balance in my students between the right mathematical answer and being able to explain the answer to their non-economist grandmothers, so I require students to write coherent essays about what they learn--a critique of an accessible article from *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, for example, or a term paper of their own econometric analysis.

I also make an honest effort at being aware of my students' varied backgrounds. By working in developing countries in East Africa, mentoring a Little Brother (through Big Brothers/Big Sisters non-profit organization) from East Oakland, volunteering with the IRS' low-income Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, and most recently volunteering with a housing advocacy group in the East Bay (East Bay for Everyone), I think I have learned to work well with people from backgrounds different from my own. From the little things like making sure my test questions include names typically associated with a balance of nationalities and genders, to not making assumptions about my students, I hope to be an inclusive and approachable teacher. Teaching at UC Berkeley, Swarthmore, and the University of San Francisco, I have learned how to deal with a wide range of ability, constantly asking myself how much economics I knew when I was 20 years old, and pausing to give students time to demonstrate whether they truly understand material.

Through this inclusiveness and by teaching up-to-date applied empirical methods on up-to-date topics, I think I can be an informed, educational, and enjoyable teacher and mentor.