

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Jun He

In the past seven years, I have progressed from an outstanding Teaching Assistant to an Instructor of Record who has demonstrated teaching excellence (per evaluations) in various campuses of the University of Connecticut (a top-ranked public university), and into a visiting instructor at Wesleyan University, a prestigious liberal arts university, during the first year of pandemic. The recognition and compliments that I received from students, teaching mentors, and university provosts testify to my strong potential and capacity in teaching both theoretical and empirical classes including fundamental-level Micro and Macroeconomics, Mathematical Economics, Law & Economics at different levels, and Econometrics. This is reflected in my evaluations, which are constantly at the outstanding level (5/5 at UConn where 5 means excellent, and 7/9 at Wesleyan where 7 means outstanding). My teaching has spanned across the time of in-person mode and remote mode. I am teaching in the 21-22 academic year at two prestigious liberal arts institutions, Wesleyan University and Trinity College. This dual teaching role has trained me to teach and advise students while managing a challenging workload. My teaching portfolio will expand to cover Introductory Statistics for Economists, Environmental Economics, and Economic Topics in Sports (a course that I created as a contribution to Wesleyan's course catalog) by the end of this academic year.

Despite the diversity in the disciplines, the teaching mode, and methodologies, I have been discovering a common underlying philosophy that ensures effective communication in class. In my class, I create and maintain an organic interaction with students, with sharing of personal experiences of learning, real-life examples, and current events. This sets the basis for classes with strong involvement. Students can freely share their perceptions, and promptly reflect on their expectations and identify any learning confusion. A better understanding of their needs enables me to adjust the teaching style and material accordingly. Student-based teaching fosters their interest and promotes their confidence and passion for the class. With the fear of making mistakes in class eliminated, my teaching enables students to challenge themselves to take on more advanced tasks, apply economics to their areas of interest and develop higher-level skills, such as critical thinking, and strong initiative of learning.

Involving and Engaging Environment for Learning

As a conscientious teacher, I appreciate the establishment of a strong rapport with students. I prefer to shorten the distance from students and to inform students that I am approachable, considerate, and helpful. When covering tough topics, I sometimes share with students the difficulties that I once encountered and how I overcame them. For instance, I shared the confusion I experienced when I first studied Econometrics as a student. I illustrated how I worked with an endless regression for my first econometric project from the wrong belief in including all regressors that were relevant to the regressand. This sharing effectively revealed to students a common mistake with causal inference research that I encountered. Also, it helped students identify with me, for I shared sympathy on the same difficulty they were experiencing at the moment. I pay special attention in my teaching to create an interactive learning environment where students receive hands-on guidance from an approachable and tangible instructor, who has experienced and now understands their difficulties and is willing to offer guidance.

This strategy helps to build an effective rapport with students. Knowing I am an approachable professor, many students have turned to me for advice. Not only do they explore class content extensively during office hours, but they also ask me about my graduate school experiences, my opinions about current events as an economist. Sometimes students are curious about my research to learn about opportunities to participate or to see how I am applying concepts to real-world scenarios.

Consistent Adaptability to Students' Needs

To maintain a good connection with students, I collect students' opinions, expectations, and suggestions by monthly surveys. The updated information enables me to dynamically adjust my course based on students' needs. The newly-created Economic Topics in Sports was originally intended to be a class of purely economic theories. But as most students suggested that they were eager to learn empirical methods for sports ("Moneyball" has been a common trend in all sports), I incorporated the introduction of empirical research in the class.

Additionally, I am aware (and I learn from one year of teaching at Wesleyan) that in liberal arts institutions, incorporating conversation about race/gender diversity is constantly appreciated. I taught students the formulaic way to argue against discrimination. For example, I led students to understand the potential fallacy in the theory that athletes from countries in tropical areas have a disadvantage in training for Olympic games due to the hot weather in their homeland. I demonstrated to students that given the various levels of economic development and social turmoil (confounding variables) between tropical countries and non-tropical countries, attributing the difference in performance among sports competitions to a country's location or these countries per se is biased, inaccurate, and improper. Students are delighted to see their appreciated values promoted with the methods that they are eager to learn to be applied to the subject matter that they are interested in.

In the 2021-20 academic year, I taught with special sympathy considering students had lacked access to facilities and supports that had been available to them in regular semesters. In response to this tough situation, I included a detailed 15-minute review at the beginning of every class, which included explanations of the most mistaken homework and the review of tough knowledge points of the last class. The new content in the remainder of that class was also closely related to the review part. This arrangement ensured a solid and incremental learning process. I found this gradual improvement helped to establish students' confidence. Also, students developed a good sense of the connections between the chapters inside this discipline. They reflected that this helped them to develop a systematic understanding of economic tasks of solving endogeneity issues as econometricians and rectifying the misaligned incentive of private parties as law-and-economists.

For Econometrics, an advanced economics major-selective course, each student is required to produce a term paper. In the first semester of teaching this course, the conversations that I had during office hours with students began with their worries such as "I want to explore some crime-related economic research but have no idea of how to start" helped me to understand their need for acquiring research skills. Therefore, in the second semester, I brought forward the deadline for the proposal to motivate early preparation for their projects. This also allowed me to adjust the teaching of the second part of the semester. I was therefore able to prepare the material on the advanced economic tools based on needs identified in their proposals. The second semester's class received strong appreciation from students in that they felt the course was specifically designed for them, and they acquired research skills that perfectly suited their projects.

Responsive Advising Approaches

I have learned in the past seven years' teaching that advising is also an indispensable part of professional services. Especially for courses with term projects due, students need intensive advising. Through in-depth conversations during office hours and beyond, I guided them to delve into the topic, find researchable tasks, and develop their discrete and ambiguous ideas into coherent logic. Benefiting from my broad knowledge in law and economics, environmental economics, industrial organization, sports economics, and labor economics, I have helped projects of various economic fields develop into quality papers.

To me, advising students on their projects is exciting and rewarding. Brainstorming or even coworking with students helps both of us to deepen our understandings in economics. For example, a sample proposal of mine suggested an empirical project that evaluates the effect of the wait time in teams winning their subsequent round of NBA playoffs as some teams may finish the previous round with fewer games. One student explored a similar

mechanism in tennis tournaments where seed players may directly enter into the second round, making the benefit of wait time more significant. I enjoy the process when students and I explore and make improvements together.

During the advising process, I also learned about students' lack of training in composing empirical projects. From the first semester's teaching of Econometrics, I found students still began the paper with how they were personally interested in certain topics while the introduction of a paper should present why a topic should arouse academic interest. I sensed the necessity of going over in detail the function that each section of a project was meant to serve. Therefore, I allotted two sessions, mentoring students on points of writing such as: for a paper to be academically interesting, it should explore some unsolved puzzle or controversy (not merely be interesting to the writer alone). Also, the period of a data set needs to be specified and an explanation should be presented on how the population involved is related to an impactful historical event. The explanation of writing greatly resolved students' confusion about what they should do for the fulfillment of a research project. The incorporation of writing mentoring in the second semester of the Econometrics class earned me high marks from the students.

Stimulation of Interest and Development of Skills and Character

Clarity and logical organization of lectures accompanied with responsive advising are the essentials of my teaching. The delivery of knowledge is merely an approach, not the goal. My teaching ultimately aims at the development of advanced abilities as lifelong learners, including independent learning, critical thinking, and rigorous reasoning. Stimulating students' interest is the fundamental method to achieve this goal.

Relating course content to real-life situations and scenarios is an effective way of stimulating interest. At the onset of the Law & Econ class, students are normally nervous because either of the two subjects alone could appear difficult to them. I intentionally break the ice and eliminate their fear by shortening the distance between this discipline and their lives with real-life examples since the first class. As I played a clip of the comedy Big Bang Theory that involved some discussion of general spirits of contracting law, students stated that I made learning in my class enjoyable. As I used video footage showing how NBA players responded to a changing rule with different play-styles to demonstrate the use of law and economics principles in studying the evolutionary path of sports, the class appeared more passionate about seeing more interdisciplinary connections (their appreciation of the sports examples persuaded Wesleyan to let me create the Economics Topics in Sports class).

Founded on the principle of making learning interesting, the next step is to further interest by leading students to apply their knowledge. After the first midterm of Law and Economics, I introduced pertinent law cases combined with current events and news to initiate deeper discussions and explorations. For instance, I introduced a car-crash case to illustrate the product liability rule. In this case, a malfunctioning auto-piloting system of Tesla and a driver that released the steering wheel for trusting the system was the reason for the crash. After a conversation of how students may decide if they were the jury, I explained Tesla's argument that releasing the steering wheel is unsafe in common sense as self-defense through contributory negligence rule and explained why the product liability law tends to protect the disadvantaged consumer in terms of information asymmetry in products. Students reflected after class that this theory-case connection dismissed their vagueness in understanding previous classes.

I introduced additional law cases to class, asked students to propose a just response using common sense, and then led them to connect their intuition to the underlying legal and economic logic. Gradually, the Socratic pedagogy fostered students' ability to connect the current cases to precedents, to argue the difference between cases, and to form their viewpoints with rigorous reasoning from equity and efficiency perspectives. In sum, through dialogical teaching, I aim to create an inclusive class environment combined with mindfully designed course content that is targeted precisely to students' needs. In my class, students develop interest, correct intuition, critical thinking, and independent research skills by experiencing the application of economics to the real world.