

## STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

WILLIAM A. SWANSON

As an educator in economics, my goal is to give students the analytical tools to better understand the world they live in. I do this in the classroom by finding ways to connect them with the material, hopefully in the end showing that many of the activities in daily life can be interpreted through an economic *lens*, or framework for understanding. The feeling that I am part of their learning is deeply rewarding. As both an undergraduate and graduate student, my professors were eternally patient and engaged with my education, and I often feel that I am paying that gratitude forward.

I hope to instill in students a love of the theory and practice of economics. When teaching, I employ at least two broad approaches that I adjust depending on the setting and topic of discussion. For instance, small group techniques work excellently during crowded office hours or seminar courses. Students lead the conversation with each other as they present their questions and suggest ways forward. I play the role of moderator, helping to guide the conversation gently towards the right answer. It is especially gratifying to watch this happen organically.

If the topic in class turns to questions that are fact-based, historical or highly technical, I will fulfill the more traditional role of presenting material to the class in a lecturing style. For each section, I come prepared to lead discussion, but I always hope for a student-led encounter. Overall, I have observed that with a healthy mixture of student-led teaching and more traditional lecturing, students make better progress on material. If I notice that they have gotten too comfortable in the passive learning role, I can ‘mix it up.’ Students are more alert and focused when I challenge them to move out occasionally from their comfort zone.

When I lecture in the traditional style, I engage them by showing that even the mundane details of our daily lives can be recast as a rich, dynamic problem of making the most from constrained resources. Questions from the public sphere that might be unrelated to economics, like: *why are there so many versions of the iPhone?* can afford me a chance to talk about barriers to entry into the electronics market, eventually taking the lecture to rest on the model of monopolistic competition. In this example I have done two things: made economics relevant to their daily lives and used a set of logically connected steps arcing from an intro, to a climax and conclusion. The lectures I feel happiest about have this quality of telling a story.

When I discuss topics in international macroeconomics, I let my excitement about research come through. I would be thrilled to engage with this material at the graduate level, in either a first or second year course. I am also well versed and comfortable with teaching any undergraduate course. For those classes in which I already have a lot of experience, such as Introductory Microeconomics, I always find fresh ways to present the material. In the end, I find it easy to stay as interested in teaching as I hope the students are in learning.

Every semester I reflect on the students’ evaluations and incorporate their feedback into my teaching for the next course. The students have their chance to be honest, and it affords me the chance to improve on old habits. For instance, in Fall 2017, a student wrote

that I could “[provide] more examples/worksheets,” and engage students with each other by “making groups.” A thoughtful suggestion, and one that I incorporated into my toolbox of teaching methods. Since that quarter, for upcoming exams I create study questions to be completed in groups during section, and at the end of section, students are asked to present their answers. Consistently, I find that students are a vital resource for each other, as they understand each others’ perspectives because they are learning the material together for the first time.

I have found that, by bringing in a more diverse set of perspectives into the classroom, students are more likely to find their voice, and are more open to hearing others’ voices. My experiences in traveling, research, and family life, help me to connect with the full spectrum of learners. An important goal of mine is to make students from all backgrounds feel comfortable and open to learning. I truly believe that such diversity will enrich the entire classroom’s understanding of economic trends, and I hope to promote this diversity in every course and make students of every class, color, and creed feel valued for the perspectives they contribute.

I always make the extra effort to be available and approachable for my students, happy to talk and curious to listen. In chance encounters with students at the coffee shop, I have happily engaged in hour long discussions about interest rates, or the possible fallout of Brexit. Ultimately, I hope to set an example for how to approach economics: as something not just relegated to the classroom or the computer screen, but something to be wrangled in conversations between colleagues. My goal in the next stage of my career is to continue helping students engage with the world through the economic lens and get them excited about the concepts. Quite sincerely, I hope what they learn stays with them long after the semester is finished.