

Teaching Statement--Yijiao Liu

In ancient times those who wanted to learn would seek out a teacher, one who could propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts. --Yu Han

In the past three years, I have been the main instructor to teach ten undergraduate courses at Stony Brook University in many economics subjects. I expect my students to achieve three objectives in their college study: a passion to the topics in economics, a capability to acquire the fundamental theoretical backgrounds with analytical skills, and an honest attitude towards learning and themselves. From a fresh new undergraduate instructor to an educator who can develop a class to inspire the students accomplishing the goals, I devote myself to teaching with the gaining experience, economics knowledge, and professional attitude.

To help students reach these learning objectives, I designed the course to encourage students to apply economics theory to real-life examples. Especially for economics learning, I found students would benefit more with vivid inspirations than reciting mathematical formulas without understanding them to prepare any test. As an economics student, I started the research agenda at the beginning of the second year in the college on the analysis of a popular topic (Chinese rural migrant workers) with students from different backgrounds (law school, mathematical departments, and economics). Since this project motivated my enthusiasm in economics study, after I became the instructor, I provided the opportunity for students to analyze practical topics with economics tools.

For example, students in my urban economics class were required to do group presentations to evaluate EZ-pass system in the United States from the perspectives of the general introduction, the demand side, the supply side, the government side, and the conclusion. They needed to first understand the basic settings of the economic models in urban economics and grouped to contribute to the project. They are also required to have a Q&A session to give feedback to other groups performance. In this way, they could have more direct interaction from the cohort and more participation in the class.

Moreover, students learn the course-oriented computer packages to develop modern skills to enhance the economic analysis. For example, students in the mathematical statistics were learning R language about primary statistics distribution and simulation methods, with ggplot2 graphing skills. Students in the class of Demographics of Developing Countries were introduced with Lyx, spatial packages in R, to conduct a comprehensive project for the course. Students in the Economic Development benefited from Google Maps tools not only for the course but also for their future presentation in other scenarios. From the feedback of the students, they could carry on learned computer skills to their future study and careers.

With the methods mentioned above, most of the students can find their interest in learning economics in the class, though there are always individual cases who are struggling with the topics. I would never give up anyone in the class to achieve more than the minimum they could do. Students who are not good test takers, in the beginning, are more welcome to participate in the class discussion. I encourage them to help others to review what they learned and give bonus points to the speakers. Class interaction is needed between the teacher and the students, and also between the students with the students. With the encouragement, students are more confident to learn and expose any of their doubts back to the instructor, and I could guide, correct and even learn from them.

Everyone would be nervous at the traditional close book, close note test, more or less. However, as a college instructor, I believe my duty is not only to teach but also guide the students to the correct approach. I value the honest attitude of learning, which means that I could contribute as much as I could to provide help for the students to get rid of the fears against unknown difficulties in the test. However, I am also aware of the hardship for the young to realize the best way for themselves. Therefore, efforts of taking good class notes, visiting office hours are also valued as good performance of the class. In one semester, the student who was prized for the best note taker was also the tutor to share class notes and study method with other cohorts. Knowing that I would give 70 different versions of tests to each one, in the end, many of the students could easily grasp and the knowledge of the entire semester without struggling with the understanding of the questions themselves.

Besides the traditional face-to-face class, I have been teaching the online class and awarded the 2017 Summer Online Teaching Initiative by Office of the Provost at Stony Brook University. The online class provides students with more flexibility to learn, and my expectations on the students would still be accomplished under the new platform. Unlike a traditional class, students are usually more relaxed to communicate with the instructor on the other side of the screen. As an instructor, the role of teaching becomes more evident as a tool of connection. But this challenge of constructing trust while not seeing each other requires more responsibility and patience with the students. I have applied other flexible mechanisms to help the students, not restricted to Google group chats, media tools such as YouTube Videos, and online discussion forum.

I want to stress that teaching is also the best teacher. I have achieved at least as much as my students in these years. I learn to be a patient, enthusiastic, energetic instructor to help the students to learn a course which could motivate them in life, serve them in practice and most importantly, make them think like an economist. I am proud of the achievement of students and expecting to see their success in challenging themselves from the class each time.