

## **Petrik Runst - Teaching Philosophy**

My overall teaching philosophy on the undergraduate level starts from the presumption that if students develop command over economic concepts, and understand them as tools to be actively used in aid of social inquiry, classes become not only places of knowledge transfer but of intellectual co-creation. My overall teaching philosophy thus, speaks to the requirement of becoming intellectually invested in a subject matter as a fundamental prerequisite of learning. Anecdotal as well as neurological/ psychological evidence suggests a relationship between the emotional and analytical parts of the brain [Gray, 1990; Brown, 2000] and underlines the important role of our natural curiosity. One corollary of this approach is the necessity to wander across academic boundaries despite the main emphasis on economics.

Independent critical thinking combined with disciplined self-guided work represents the basis for success for students in higher education. My classes provide a learning arena in which these skills can be developed and applied. I play a twofold role in the classroom. First, I provide ideas, models, or ways of thinking about the social world which might result in a deeper insight or provoke critical reaction. This first task is undertaken by laying down an outline of the class which is open to further refinement depending on the student's interest, and by selecting texts and subjects for verbal or written discussion. I also challenge beliefs, taking on opposite views in order to widen the discussion or to provoke a more thorough analytic defense.

Apart from this initial stimulus, I facilitate the conversation more broadly. It is not my intention to simply transfer knowledge between minds. I want the students to develop a sense of proprietorship for the ideas that they are developing in the class room. Sometimes I begin by discussing policy topics such as immigration, globalization, discrimination or substance use. During the discussions I then take cues from the students and ask questions that redirect the flow of the conversation to the broader underlying economic, political and philosophical principles. I could ask: "What is the principle by which we could judge whether Brian's or Rosie's policy response leads to a more desirable outcome?", "What microeconomic principle could help us explain X?" or "Why are economists so critical about monopoly in the first place?" Once we have thus created a bridge to a set of theoretical foundations, the students often start

to see things in a 'new light' and these are the moments of great satisfaction from a teacher's point of view. Students are invested in the material and strive to take the discussion further driven by their internal motivation. My comments may sometimes simply encourage the students to rephrase their ideas or translate them into academic language; I might challenge parts of their beliefs or connect them with another student's earlier comment. This latter process could be described as building a bridge between a chaotic creativity and the more disciplined discourse of trained economists. Both components are critical, creativity without discipline is like a raw diamond, discipline without creativity leads to narrow and sterile ideas. If the subject matter constrains the amount of class discussion I seek alternative means, such as empirical projects, class room experiments and so forth to bring the material alive and to render it meaningful and relevant.

In order to stimulate involvement, I for example assigned 'Class Journals' and 'Think Pieces'. The former consists of a document that goes back and forth between student and me. The student may raise a number of issues that he/she encountered outside of class and which are related to the course topic. 'Think Pieces' on the other hand represent problems which the students discuss *before* they will be discussed in class. Thus when the students come to class they have engaged critically with the material. If class size permits I favor short answer tests, as opposed to multiple-choice. I also assign independent research projects in most of my classes in order to encourage self-directed study.

## References

**Brown, Reva Berman. 2000.** Contemplating the emotional component of learning: The emotions and feelings involved when undertaking an MBA. In *Management Learning*, 31(3): 275-293

**Gray, Jeffrey. 1990.** Brain Systems that Mediate both Emotion and Cognition. In *Cognition & Emotion*, 4(3): 269-288