

## Alexa Prettyman

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Teaching economics provides me with the exciting opportunity to equip students with the skillset to understand complex socio-economic issues, such as poverty and inequality, through an economic framework. Whether I am teaching elective economics classes or introductory courses, I welcome the challenge of sparking economic interest within non-economists. I am well-prepared to teach various economics classes as I can relate economic theory to everyday policy discussions which shows students how to think about these issues from an economist's perspective. I have designed and taught two distinct upper-level undergraduate economics elective courses guided by the following teaching philosophy.

Educators have a unique opportunity to shape young minds and influence the future. I developed a passion for math in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, a passion for economics in college, and a passion for policy evaluation more recently as a result of having effective educators. My academic interests, career path, and pursuit of lifelong learning can be attributed to these instructors and their pedagogy. They taught passionately, assigned purposeful projects that were both challenging and achievable, set high but clear expectations, and expressed a genuine interest in the success of their students. I base my pedagogy on these four characteristics (passion, purpose, clarity, and respect) to motivate and promote lifelong learning and growth within my students.

First, passion both captures and holds the attention of students. I exemplify passion about the subjects I teach by carefully designing lecture notes to be relevant and timely. I also demonstrate a passion for teaching in general by maintaining an open-door policy and welcoming questions via email or in-person. Although my office hours were only two days a week, I saw students every day, as they utilized my open-door policy.

Second, assigning purposeful tasks maintains motivation and assists learning. Using Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide, I assign problem sets and projects that use a combination of remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. The problem sets include questions ranging from recalling concepts and reworking examples from class to downloading data, creating graphs, and summarizing the findings. Projects are a mix of writing and presenting, data work, and group work. For group projects, I assign students to work with others from different majors and backgrounds to complete a task and share their work with the class. In one class, students had to identify a poverty-related issue and recommend a policy solution justified with economic theory and evidence. In another class, students had to read, present, and lead the discussion about a published economics research paper.

Third, high, clear, and consistent expectations motivate students to put in maximum effort. Similar to a fitness coach, it is important to push students to their limits without fatiguing them because we want to see results without injury. Once a student becomes fatigued, confusion clouds the learning process. Low expectations yield no results, and overly ambitious expectations may actually demotivate students, especially if a student attributes failure to lack of ability. Clear and consistent expectations are important because they give students the ability to reflect on their progress. Students can use exam scores and feedback on assignments to measure their progress; however, without clear and consistent expectations, the grade is meaningless. On "syllabus day," I explicitly explain class expectations and learning objectives.

Throughout the semester I reiterate my expectations, create and follow rubrics, provide individual and class feedback, and hold all students to the same standards. I grade strictly to maintain high expectations, and to maintain effort and respect, I provide ample feedback and opportunities to improve grades.

Finally, although learning comes from the student, it can be motivated and guided by a respected educator. Respect is only gained through giving. Leadership workshops that I have attended throughout my collegiate career emphasize the importance of respect and explain that people are more inspired to do things for people they respect. I believe this follows through to students and their learning. Respectable teachers make an effort to demonstrate that they care about their students and class time. Some ways in which I show respect include taking a personal interest in students and their ideas, learning names, carefully listening to questions and responses, and treating everyone equally. Additionally, I teach the entire allotted time and start and end class on time to demonstrate my respect for education and my students' time. Overall, I create an environment where students feel that they are in control of their learning and are comfortable asking questions.

When structuring class, it is important to maximize classroom instruction and include inclusive activities to appeal to students with varying learning styles. A typical lecture starts on time with an engaging and focusing five to ten-minute activity that helps students recall material taught last class or prompts thinking for the current lecture. During class throughout the year, I use a variety of teaching methods, such as traditional lectures and slide presentations, flipped classroom, short video clips, think-pair-share, small group discussions, and full class discussions. Math equations and examples are always written and worked on the board, by me or students, to encourage students to take notes and work through the problems. Studies show that longhand notetaking is more effective for learning than typing.<sup>1</sup> Five to ten minutes before class ends, I close the loop by making connections between class content and the real world or assigning a task that promotes recall or reflection, such as a 1 to 2 question quiz. Through course evaluations, I have learned that students are particularly receptive to these exit quizzes because they incentivize them to pay more attention during class. With more teaching experience, I will continue to use students' feedback to better understand which assignments, activities, and teaching methods students find most beneficial and adopt new ideas accordingly.

Teaching is a mirrored action: a student's effort to learn reflects a teacher's effort to educate. My effort to educate is demonstrated through being enthusiastic and teaching passionately, assigning meaningful tasks, setting high, clear, and consistent expectations, and taking a genuine interest in the success of my students. As an educator, my goal is to be an inspiration and effective resource for lifelong learning and growth. I know that I am progressing towards achieving my goal because my students ask questions beyond the scope of the class, have acquired an interest in economics, and utilize me as a resource for their continued education.

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<sup>1</sup> Mueller, P. and D. Oppenheimer. 2014. The pen is mightier than the keyboard: advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science*, 25(6): 1159-68.