

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Arne Hallam

Learning involves not only the memorization of facts and formulas but a deeper understanding of the principles on which they are based and how these principles can be applied to solve problems, to understand other principles, to provide service to others, to find joy in one's personal life and to share these insights with others. The litmus test of learning is whether the student applies these principles or simply deposits them like so much rubbish in the deeper reaches of the brainstem soon to be forgotten. Understanding comes only as students understand basic principles and ideas. The purpose of a university is not to teach specific applied skills but to teach individuals how to think, how to reason logically and mathematically, how to collect and synthesize data, how to appreciate different perspectives, how to learn from the past, how to appreciate the arts and literature, how to speak and present argument, and how to write clearly and forcefully. My goal in teaching is to help students learn how to think about problems in a logical manner using basic economic reasoning, to formulate simple models of complex phenomenon, to use mathematics to simplify complex ideas, to use statistical and numerical methods to analyze both actual data and theoretical concepts, to think about simple practical problems in new and insightful ways, to learn to solve problems in a group setting, to bring material from a variety of sources to bear on a particular issue, and to know how to obtain information and knowledge on their own. There is an old saying that if you give a woman a fish, you have fed her and her family for a day but that if you teach her how to fish you have fed her and other generations for a lifetime. My goal in teaching is to prepare students for a lifetime for learning.

The techniques I use are based on my own experience as a student, significant reading, working with youth and adults in non-university settings, and observation of other teachers. Some of the methods I use are as follows.

- i) I regularly use small group discussion and presentations allowing students to apply principles discussed in class to specific problems. These discussions allow them to think, reason, argue, bring to bear other information, consult resource material, organize it in a coherent fashion and present it to a group. I sometimes organize this in the form of a debate.
- ii) I often ask students to regularly read the Wall Street Journal or other such news sources and be ready to present an economic principle they found to the class on an impromptu basis. This helps them learn how to interpret class material in a real world context and discuss it with peers.
- iii) I regularly assign problem sets (usually weekly) requiring the students to apply the material discussed in class. These often involve mathematical derivations, empirical analysis of data or synthesis of outside reading. Students learn only by doing.
- iv) I often give unannounced quizzes to encourage students to continually review the material and think about how to apply it.
- v) I usually require a term project involving research, analysis, and quality writing.
- vi) I infuse my lectures with real world examples of principles discussed both to encourage students to apply the principles and to help them understand them by relating them to things they already understand and can observe.
- vii) I continually tell students how I feel about the material, how I remember learning it, things that are hard for me to understand, and how I would suggest they better understand it.
- viii) I let students know that they can call me at any hour of the day or night if they are having problems with the material and that I will always try to help them succeed in the class.
- ix) I expect quality performance from the students and let them know that the world after the university expects the same.
- x) I continually relate the material to my personal life: how economic reasoning can help one decide which school to choose and which entertainment to pursue, how scientific knowledge can improve the quality of life, how life is more than profits and losses, and that the arts, literature, nature, family and religion are as important to a complete life as economic success.

