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Teaching Philosophy and Practice

Teaching is as much learning about the concerns and perspectives of today's youth as it is conveying ideas and facts to them. In interactions with my more engaged students I have discovered the joy of introducing someone to a new field of thought or way of thinking and of learning from them in turn what they find useful about it and how they think differently about the same issues. In my time at UMass I have taught five and assisted for four courses gaining experience in teaching a wide variety of economic subjects (see CV for complete list of courses taught and TAed). Though, of course this is only the beginning of my teaching career and I hope to learn much more. In addition to academic courses I have also facilitated several popular workshops for students and community activists through the Center for Popular Economics (CPE) and have taught two online courses for them as well. CPE emphasizes participatory teaching methods with the aim of demystifying economics for lay people.

I have sought to teach my own classes whenever possible because I enjoy the process of thinking through the course content and organization, and of course I love teaching itself. Designing my own classes has enabled me to step beyond the bounds of a conventional economics curriculum. I believe in conveying to students the inseparability of political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of human life even as we approach society from the standpoint of the economy. My syllabus for the class on Economic Development included not only classic papers from economists such as Arthur Lewis, Amartya Sen, and Joseph Stiglitz but also from anthropologists (Arturo Escobar, Marshall Sahlins), historians (Ram Guha), international relations scholars (John Hobson), and activists (Vandana Shiva).¹

Economics has the reputation of being a dry subject but I have discovered that students respond enthusiastically if economic theories are connected to current socio-economic issues. In the classroom I try to show how thought arises from concrete material contexts and how in turn, ideas shape the world we live in. One popular example of this that I have used on more than one occasion is the discourse on government intervention in the economy and how it changes over the course of the 20th century. I try to include as many primary texts as possible in the curriculum, a practice that is somewhat unusual in a textbook-centered Economics classroom. For example my Marxian Economics class asked students to read several of Marx's own writings and while teaching Macroeconomics I ask students to read at least some writings of Keynes.

I rely heavily on conventional chalk-and-talk methods but as the material demands I also use slides and other audio-visual media such as documentaries. Lately I have also made use of the extensive educational resources on the Internet including film clips, lecture videos and documentaries available free online. However I do not think that such media content can substitute for explication by the instructor and engagement with students. Nor do I think audio-visual media can substitute for reading on part of the students. My assignments and exams avoid busy-work. Questions are embedded in a specific social context and require students to connect classroom concepts to the outside world. I also achieve this by regularly bringing in articles from newspapers for classroom discussions. Students do not compete against each other for grades. Where class size permits I also encourage student presentations and case-studies. Students in my Economic Development class greatly enjoyed being able to research and present material on their chosen cases, at the end of the semester.

¹Complete syllabi for all my courses are available at <http://people.umass.edu/abasole/teaching.html>.

Though opportunities to interact with students on an individual basis have been less frequent than I wanted, I have greatly enjoyed the interactions that did take place. Almost in every class I have taught, I have been fortunate to be able to strike a chord with few of the more engaged students and continue to interact with them well after the semester ended.

As a result of my own heterodox training I tend to present economics not as received truth but as contested terrain shaped not only by economists but also by the media, politicians and ordinary citizens. Class discussions and student presentations usually form an important part of my advanced courses. I try to create an atmosphere in which diverse and contrary views can be expressed, but at the same time I do not attempt to hide my own opinions since I have found that doing so only inhibits my ability to teach effectively. The ideal I strive for is a healthy debate in the classroom where listening to contrary views and reflecting on them becomes an integral part of education itself.

In classes I teach in the future, I would like to reduce the distance between the classroom and the world outside even further, by bringing in professionals and activists from outside to give guest lectures and by providing opportunities for students to use their experiences outside the classroom in their course work. I also look forward to mentoring undergraduates on an individual basis. I feel that the School for Critical Social Inquiry would offer an environment very conducive to the kind of pedagogy I want to practice and would enable me to grow as a teacher.

Student Evaluations

Copies of official course evaluations are available on request. Here I list responses to a few selected questions from the evaluation questionnaire.

Overall rating of instructor's teaching, 1 = almost never effective, 5 = almost always effective

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.36
Economic Development	4.82
Principles of Microeconomics	4.20
Introduction to Political Economy	4.50
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.70
Marxian Economics	4.40

Overall rating of this course, 1 = one of the worst, 5 = one of the best

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.21
Economic Development	4.55
Principles of Microeconomics	3.90
Introduction to Political Economy	4.20
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.40
Marxian Economics	4.40

The instructor was well prepared for class, 1 = almost never, 5 = almost always

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.79
Economic Development	5.00
Principles of Microeconomics	4.90
Introduction to Political Economy	4.90
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.70
Marxian Economics	4.90

The instructor inspired interest in the subject matter, 1 = almost never, 5 = almost always

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.21
Economic Development	4.55
Principles of Microeconomics	4.40
Introduction to Political Economy	4.40
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.40
Marxian Economics	4.60

*Selected anonymous student comments***Marxian Economics**

One of the best classes I have taken. Amit is one of the best professors I have encountered here. The content was very good, not your typical course, I enjoyed the class. The lectures were very interesting and concepts always explained clearly. Good readings also.

Intermediate Macroeconomics

Amit has a knack for boiling down complex and abstract theories and making them approachable and understandable. Especially for someone so young, Amit is an excellent teacher .

Introduction to Political Economy

1. He is very easy to understand, explains subjects very well, always approachable and eager to help his students.
2. Was a very enjoyable class, very informative, I am very interested in the topic now. I feel that I have a much better understanding of the economy and its ties to society.

Principles of Microeconomics

1. Amit definitely knows his stuff and is always prepared. He explains things thoroughly and is much better than some tenured professors at conveying the material.
2. Mr. Basole is passionate about the material and a naturally talented teacher. He conveys the material clearly and with enthusiasm, and is always willing to answer questions and help students understand the material better.

Economic Development

1. Loved this class, one of my best so far in the Economics department. Amit was a great prof.
2. Professor Basole is the most accessible and intelligent professor I have had at UMass. He has a strong ability to explain complex ideas in a very engaging and interesting way. Course was outstanding. I have really enjoyed the class thoroughly and it is easily the best class that I have taken.

Money and Banking

1. Amit does whatever he can to make sure students understand the material, are prepared and succeed in this class. He will take extra time to explain areas of confusion and genuinely cares about the student progress in the class.
2. Amit was an incredibly helpful TA. He explained the material in a logical way that allowed me to completely understand the intuition behind it. He was also extremely approachable and handled all questions above and beyond what was required. In my 4 years here he is easily one of the best teachers or TAs I have had.