

Amit Basole: Teaching Statement

A. Philosophy and strategies

I came to Economics late in my career after having experienced learning and teaching in Biology. I found that Economics presents unique challenges and opportunities that Biology had not afforded me. I have always loved the process of teaching no matter the topic but I have discovered that teaching Economics gives me special joy. While teaching Economics I can make certain direct connections to students' lives outside the classroom. I can bring in newspaper articles relating to ongoing debates in society. I found it easier to involve students in class discussions and to link the debates inside class to broader social concerns.

I believe that undergraduate education should not only instruct students in their chosen field of study, but also more generally prepare them to be thinking individuals who are aware of the pressing concerns of the times they live in, and of the histories of their own societies. Thus I hardly ever teach a class in economics without making connections to current issues, to economic history (both US and non-US) or to the history of economic thought.

While preparing lectures and teaching I try to keep two goals in mind at all times. One, I am always looking for ways to effectively communicate the core concepts and the intuition behind them without getting lost in the graphs and the mathematics. For this I usually employ a “running example” for a given topic, to which I can return again and again (sometimes throughout the semester). Second, I am always looking to teach critically, inviting students to think and reflect on the concepts rather than accepting them as received truth. I attempt to do this regardless of whether I personally believe in the particular idea being discussed. 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.

Although I rely quite heavily on conventional chalk-and-talk methods and to some extent on overheads and power-point slides, I regularly integrate documentary films and other audio-visual media into my syllabi, including online resources. When designing assignments and exams, I make sure that students are not simply being given busy-work, but that the questions make them think through the material. I try to limit simple problem solving or definition questions, and instead embed the basic concept being tested in a broader context. I also regularly bring in real-life data (for e.g. stock or oil prices) for asking questions, so the students get a chance to apply their learning outside the textbook examples. In courses beyond the freshman level, while choosing readings I try to include a mix of didactic pieces (such as parts of textbooks), recent articles and where appropriate, primary texts. Copies of my syllabi, assignments and exams are available upon request.

In addition to teaching academic courses, through the Center for Popular Economics (CPE), I have also facilitated several popular workshops for students and activists. CPE emphasizes participatory teaching methods with the aim of demystifying economics. I find that this type of teaching enables me to teach regular academic courses more effectively.

B. Experience

I have taught Economics for three years as a Teaching Assistant and as an Instructor with full responsibility. A complete list of my teaching follows.

Academic Courses: Full Responsibility

Summer 2009 The Economic Crisis and the Case for a Solidarity Economy (Online Course)
Spring 2009 Marxian Economics
Winter 2009 Intermediate Macroeconomics
Fall 2008 Introduction to Political Economy
Summer 2008 What's The Economy For, Anyway? (Online Course)
Spring 2008 Principles of Microeconomics
Fall 2007 Economic Development

Academic Courses: Teaching Assistant

Spring 2007 Marxian Economics
Spring 2007 Introduction to Macroeconomics
Fall 2006 Money and Banking
Spring 2003 Motion: Physiology and Psychophysics (Graduate level)
Fall 2001 Concepts in Neuroscience (Graduate level)

Popular Education

July 12th-17th 2009: Co-teacher Center for Popular Economics (CPE) Summer Institute ("International Economics Track"), World Fellowship Center, Conway, N.H

May 29-30th, 2008: Co-teacher, CPE participatory workshop on "Why we need a Solidarity Economy." At The Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, Tennessee.

August 5th, 2007: Co-teacher, CPE participatory workshop on "Shifts in Economic Frameworks and Policy Implications: Keynesian versus Neo-Liberal Economics" at The Drum Major Institute Summer School, New York.

July 3rd-15th, 2006: Lecturer on "Race, Class and Gender in Capitalism" and participating scholar in Project 2050, a summer program for high school students run by the New World Theater, Univ. of Mass, Amherst, Ma

July 7th, 2006: Co-teacher, CPE participatory workshop on "Rising Caseloads, Shrinking Resources: What's Driving These Trends?", at The Social Welfare Institute of Monmouth University, New Jersey

July 2006: Co-teacher Summer Institute ("International Economics Track"), Center for Popular Economics (CPE), Amherst, MA

C. Sample course outlines and syllabi

Course syllabi are available at <http://people.umass.edu/abasole/teaching.html>

D. Student Evaluations

Copies of course evaluation summary sheets can be provided separately. Here I list responses to a few selected questions from the evaluation questionnaire.

1. Overall rating of instructor's teaching.

(1 = almost never effective, 5 = almost always effective)

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.36, 4.57
Economic Development	4.82
Principles of Microeconomics	4.20
Introduction to Political Economy	4.50
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.70
Marxian Economics	4.40

2. Overall rating of this course.

(1 = One of the worst, 5 = One of the best)

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.21, 4.43
Economic Development	4.55
Principles of Microeconomics	3.90
Introduction to Political Economy	4.20
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.40
Marxian Economics	4.40

3. The instructor was well prepared for class.

(1 = Almost never, 5 = Almost always)

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.79, 4.86
Economic Development	5.00
Principles of Microeconomics	4.90
Introduction to Political Economy	4.90
Intermediate Macroeconomics	4.70
Marxian Economics	4.90

4. The instructor inspired interest in the subject matter.

(1 = Almost never, 5 = Almost always)

Course	Rating
Money and Banking	4.21, 3.86
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 from course evaluations:

Econ 305: 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.

Econ 204: 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.

Econ 105: Introduction to Political Economy

He is very easy to understand, explains subjects very well, always approachable and eager to help his students.

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.

The teacher is awesome and I love all of the assignments.

Econ 103: Principles of Microeconomics

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.

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.

Econ 366: Economic Development

This course was very interesting to me. I enjoyed the topics that we discussed in class. Amit really has a very effective way of teaching the material. I like the fact that the assignments were more writing intensive.

Loved this class, one of my best so far in the Economics department. Amit was a great prof.

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.

Amazing class, phenomenal professor!

Econ 311: Money and Banking

Amit is a great instructor. He goes out of his way to help you with any questions you have or extra help you need. He is very nice and really understands the material.

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.

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.