Teaching Statement – Jonathan L. Graves

As a teacher of economics, I have three main learning objectives for my classes: (1) to develop an appreciation of the important role economics plays in the world around them, (2) to build critical and logical thinking skills, so that my students can use economic reasoning to confront problems in the real world, (3) to convey the excitement and thrill of discovery that comes with thinking up their own questions and learning how to answer them using the skills they have developed. I think these goals are important because they not only make economics a more practical and more approachable subject for students but also because they help make my students into better citizens and problem-solvers.

In order to do this, I consider engagement key in getting students involved and interested in learning. I start my course with an open-ended question: how do we evaluate a real-world policy? Most of my students are senior-level undergraduates, with years of post-secondary training, but tend to struggle with this task. Economics is traditionally taught in a very specific, highly mathematical, and assignment-based approach. By working in small group discussions, with my facilitation, students begin to delineate the different parts of the problem and break down their expectations about what it means to try and solve a problem. Not all answers are multiple choice! They begin to make connections to their studies, and to apply their experiences to make judgment calls about what to focus on. Bringing the discussion back together, the class as a whole summarizes their first attempt; from there, I move to a more traditional lecture format, using the ideas expressed as a structure.

I view my lectures not as a self-contained piece of information, but instead as part of a continuous process of learning, which goes on outside the classroom. To this end, I routinely encourage students to bring in examples of topics they've seen in lecture. We read news articles and listen to podcasts, and share with one another how they relate to the topics we've seen in class. I view lectures as a way to present a *framework* upon which we can hang the many interesting and compelling ways economics interacts with our daily lives. I make assignments part of a discussion students have with one another and with me, as their teacher; both literally and figuratively. I emphasize the importance of considering different approaches, and using their economic reasoning to decide what is important and what is secondary.

The keystone to this approach is to help students realize that economic questions are everywhere, and to get them excited about answering them. I encourage them to choose topics they are passionate about, and to try and see how they can interpret them through an economic lens. I spend time, one-on-one, carefully working with students to turn a topic they care about into a piece of research they are proud to show to employers or graduate schools. I work with students who are struggling extensively; I show appreciation for the varied, demanding, and often technical skills my courses asks of my students. In doing this, I explicitly put faith in them and show that, with support and hard work, they can overcome any challenge. Guiding students from a vague idea, through difficulties, to a final product they are pleased with is immensely rewarding.

I do not believe that any of this would be possible without my own passion for economics and research. I try to convey in every lecture how excited I am about the topic, and how the tools and models we're learning relate to the bigger picture. I evaluate my success as a teacher primarily through how students reflect this passion back to me; in both their attitudes and the quality of the work they submit. It is this reflection, the endless energy and enthusiasm my students project back to me, that makes teaching something I love to do. I am consistently impressed, surprised, and delighted by the work my students do and the exciting, interesting, topics they choose to explore.