

**Dave Brown**  
**Kansas State University**  
**Teaching Philosophy**

I often hear students talking about how economics can be a “dry” and “boring” subject. Even many adults display sarcastic enthusiasm or complete disinterest when I tell them that I teach economics. One of my teaching goals is to eliminate the stereotype that economics is just about the stock market and is a boring subject. I don’t want my students asking themselves “why should I care about economics?” While teaching, I make it a point to preemptively answer this question so my students realize why economics is important and how it affects them. Teaching gives me the opportunity to help students think about economics in their everyday lives.

In my classes, I teach the material with examples of how the theory links to reality. Rather than just teaching the textbook material, I am always looking for outside materials to discuss in class that illustrate real-life examples. Specifically, I look for news articles that relate to economic topics we have covered in recent classes. While many instructors may also do this, I take it one step further – if I get the article from the internet, I look at the responses that various people have posted about the article and bring these forum comments to class as well. We then discuss if we agree or disagree with the responses, which further promotes students to share their own opinions and personal stories. One of the unique aspects of reviewing the forum responses is that they can come from anybody from anywhere in the world, young or old, white or blue collar. It creates an interesting and often entertaining in-class discussion of the article and how people of all different walks of life feel about the topic, including many people who may not have had any formal economics training.

A second goal of mine is to be able to relate to my students. I do my best to make myself accessible to students, and I am always more than willing to take students’ questions during both office hours and class time. I specifically mention my office hours about once a week during class and encourage students to visit if they have questions, or even if they just happen to be near my office. Relating to my students comes partly from being friendly and personable towards them, as well as using humor in class and in office hours. When students visit me, I always spend some time talking with them about something other than economics. I treat each visitor as a real person, rather than just an economics student – I believe that students can learn more effectively if they realize they have a caring and personable instructor rather than just a robot with a one-track mind ready to only perform economics. Many students have written in teaching evaluations that I am very approachable and one of the only instructors they have felt comfortable visiting during office hours. Relating to the students extends to the classroom as well – I teach the course material in an easy to understand way, but at the same time I make sure class is not taught in a manner that is belittling or demeaning to the students. If I clearly see that students do not understand the material, I will give another example and explain the theory in a different way. If the class understands the material, I move on to new topics so the students don’t get bored with the same subject matter.

My final goal is to have the students know that they have learned real-life applications in my class. I believe there is a strong distinction between “learning something” and “learning something useful.” I don’t want students simply “learning something” by memorizing cause and effect relationships, definitions, and graphs. I want my students “learning something useful” by knowing the story behind the economic theory and how the material can be applied to both current events and everyday events in their lives. In class, new material is taught by explaining the intuition first, making sure the students understand the motivation behind studying the new topic and how it relates to what we have previously discussed. Mathematical and graphical concepts complement the basic insights and are taught after the students know the importance of studying the topics. In order to “learn something”, I give the students a far-fetched example that does nothing more than clearly illustrate the economic concept that we are studying at the time. Then, to facilitate “learning something useful”, I apply the concept to a real-life example. With the real-life example, we inspect causes, effects, policy implications, and the intentions of the policymakers.

Overall, I think that “learning something useful” will help the students to retain the material, even after the semester ends. I wouldn’t think of a course as successful if the students simply took the final exam and immediately forgot all of the information given to them in the class. Instead, I want the students to continue to think about economic concepts by studying their own actions as well as the decisions of firms and policymakers. It may sound like a lofty goal, but I think a successful economics course is one that a student can use and look back on throughout his or her life.