Teaching Philosophy
Pavlo Buryi
Northern Illinois University

Teaching Economics to young minds over the last couple of years has taught me one important lesson; teaching is an art. It requires talent, skill, dedication, passion, knowledge, hard work and preparation, but most importantly, willingness to learn and develop new ways to engage your students. Four years ago, for the first time in my life, I stood in front of a room full of students from diverse backgrounds with different interests and skill levels as an independent instructor. After the first few sessions of my class, I came to the conclusion that preparing a lecture on a fancy power point and tediously going over the prepared notes was not enough, and that I needed to find ways to engage the students by making the material more interesting.

But with no prior teaching experience, I was not sure where to start. Fortunately, I found someone who mastered the art of making seemingly dry economic concepts interesting and fun. His name is Dr. Richard Grabowski. I met him during my first year of graduate school when I was assigned to be his teaching assistant for a course titled: “History and Philosophy of the World’s Economic System.” Dr. Grabowski’s approach to teaching impressed me. His cool demeanor, and his ability to blend historical facts with interesting anecdotes made the class very interesting for the students. I watched students walk up to him after class to ask more questions or share their opinions. I watched him listen intently and respectfully engage these students as upcoming young scholars and professionals.

Dr. Grabowski taught me by example, and I learned a great deal from him. I realized that importance of personal interaction is crucial in changing learning outcomes for the better. Personal relationships are crucial for identifying students who might need additional help due to the state of their physical or psychological health, without which the problem would not be addressed and students' success would be jeopardized. But the most important thing that Dr. Grabowski taught me was that teaching is not a job, it is a privilege.

I take my job seriously and spend a lot of time preparing for each class. I am constantly looking for current examples of economic concepts in the real world. At the beginning of each chapter, I show a small news clip or a video, and then initiate a discussion to engage students on the topic. For example, when we were covering a chapter on elasticity in my Principle of Microeconomics class, I showed students a recent news clip about a pharmaceutical company that raised the price of a life-saving drug by 5000%. This news had gained a lot of public attention and it initiated a lively discussion in class. After the discussion, I used the information from the video to justify the price hike. The controversial nature of the video allowed us to explore the ethical side of conducting business and presented us with an opportunity to introduce the role of government policy in mitigating market failures. After each class, I make all videos and lecture notes available on Blackboard. It is a great tool as it allows students to learn at their own pace and keep track of their grades and feedback. However, in the classroom, I prefer a more traditional approach like writing notes on the board and explaining ideas/concepts without PowerPoint slides. When students rewrite the notes, they are physically engaged, and as a result, more attentive.

To enhance my teaching methodology, I attended several faculty development sessions hosted by The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence on how to make teaching materials accessible for students with disabilities, use technology more effectively, and incorporate experiential learning into my curriculum. The most recent innovation that I have incorporated to my Principles of Macroeconomics course is a semester long extra credit project to study inflation in the local area. I encourage students to come up with a constant
basket of goods that they purchase at a local store and keep all of their receipts. At the end of the semester, students are required to prepare a detailed report on CPI and the rate of inflation in the local area. It allows students to "do" economics rather than to study it from a book.

To insure that I am constantly improving as a teacher, I use the end of the semester Instructor Course Evaluations (ICE) to identify the areas where improvement is needed, and to assess whether the changes implemented in the previous semesters were effective or not. I talk to my current students and ask them about the structure of the course, delivery style, and the relevance of examples and in class discussions. I also reach out to my colleagues for their feedback. I have asked numerous faculty both at Southern Illinois University and at the University of Tampa to sit in on my classes and provide me with their opinions and suggestions on how I can improve my teaching style.

I have progressed as a teacher, and have improved a great deal compared to the first time when I taught as an independent instructor. The progress is visible and it can be seen in the steady improvement of my evaluations. Moreover, a lot of students feel like they found a new friend. I have had people come to my office to cry, laugh, tell personal stories, and ask for advice on a variety of different subjects that are beyond the scope of economic science. Just recently, as a token of students' appreciation, I got invited by the members of both the men's and women's soccer teams to attend home games to be recognized as a MVP (Most Valuable Professor) during a special half-time ceremony at the center field.

(Pavlo Buryi 10/11/16)