STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I have been intensively involved in teaching during the past four and half years at Indiana University. Teaching every semester—including three summers—I have worked with over 800 students and have enjoyed interacting with them.

The two things I value the most in my teaching are student involvement and critical thinking: in order for students to understand what they’re learning in the classroom, they must be actively involved in the learning process. By engaging in classroom activities, students develop critical thinking skills that they will use throughout their careers.

To encourage student involvement and critical thinking, I do not take the textbook as the Bible in the classroom. Instead, I encourage students to question and debate the material, themselves, and each other throughout the whole course. To encourage active debate and inquiry, I share with the students different opinions in the literature about the topics under discussion. When students are exposed to varied, and sometimes opposing viewpoints, they become more interested in the topics at hand; this strategy also promotes self-directed learning. I’ve noticed that students are excited to find that there are some economists who share their opinions. Such a discovery helps build up their confidence to think independently and critically.

I also promote independent thinking in another way, too. When students ask me questions about the course material, it is very tempting to give direct answers to students. However, I use the “answering by asking” technique. The first step in this technique is to avoid immediately directing students to the right answers in the textbook. Instead, I ask them where they are stuck and what they already have done to figure out the question. Then, based on their responses, I guide them through the problem by asking questions. So, the next time they are having trouble, rather than come to me for an answer or solution, they can follow the same methodology and independently solve the problem.

Along with fostering independent learning and critical thinking in my classroom, I strive to create a positive learning environment. I create a positive, encouraging environment because I assume that students who think differently are not necessarily making mistakes. On tests, for example, students often can receive full credit on exams and other graded work as long as they justify their answers. Additionally, when discussing controversial economic topics, I like to “give up” my authority as an instructor by refusing to endorse a particular point of view. Instead, I prefer to help students make their own decisions by asking them to present and evaluate evidence from both sides.

A positive learning environment also can be achieved when instructors respect and promote diversity. As an instructor, I feel it’s important to be aware that students often
have different learning styles and paces. To address this, I carefully schedule the class material and tempo to help the students who are struggling and to challenge the more adept students. Moreover, for those students who want to know more, I provide additional learning opportunities; supplemental, voluntary instruction sessions, for instance, are given at various times throughout the course.

I also create assignments and exercises that encourage students to apply course material instead of simply memorize it. For example, in my statistics course, students participate in a meaningful project in which they are given data and asked to select questions with economic and managerial meaning. They are asked to answer the questions by applying what they have learned in class to the data. This empirical project can fill up the gap between knowing and doing since it requires a deeper understanding of the material in the textbook. In addition, students work in teams for this project. Team work encourages students to learn from one another. But, sometimes group projects can reward passivity and non-participation. In order to counteract this, I have a policy which states that group members’ individual grades are weighted by a peer evaluation. This evaluation efficiently identifies those who have—and have not—contributed to the project.

My teaching philosophy also emphasizes open communication with students. I take pride in treating them as my equal. I listen to them, respect them, and am willing to share my feelings with them. Then, I learn how they are doing with the course and can adjust my teaching accordingly, and they know I am always available whenever they need help. As a result, I earn their trust and enjoy my teaching.