

Jéssica Dutra
Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Evaluation
Email: dutra@ku.edu Webpage: <https://dutra.live/teaching>

Whenever I think about my role as an instructor, my focus is on student learning and not necessarily teaching as an end in and of itself. My definition of learning¹ contains a set of three critical components to learning: *process*, *change* and *experience*.

To achieve these goals, I have developed the following specific teaching strategies:

(i) Focus on the concepts and problem solving skills

Among the Social Sciences, Economics is undoubtedly one of the most computationally heavy and model intense. It becomes easy for students to get caught up in memorizing a series of steps in order to obtain the solution without realizing the underlying principles, lessons and assumptions that have led to that particular path of solution.

In order to address this particular issue in terms of backwards design and scaffolding, I start by describing a particular economic issue that the upcoming economic model is trying to address and describe - this is sometimes done through a simple narrative of a situation, exposure to real-world business cases or even classroom experiments.² Students are then asked to identify previous economic models they have learned previously and their limitations to study this particular situation. This step is particularly important as it allows student to develop natural links within theory and literature, as well as to understand the extension and limitations of each approach.

The new model is then introduced with its composing elements and figures. At this point there is no computation involved, but rather the focus lies on getting students to interact conceptually with each building block, the steps taken and the reasoning behind each of them, until finally the conclusion can be seen as a natural consequence of the economic environment and assumptions. Only then students are exposed to various functional forms of agents' optimization problems and can explore algebraic and analytical solutions.

A particular advantage of this method is the students' acquired ability to transcend the simple setup in the initial exposure by learning how to deal with changes in assumptions, comparative statics and functional forms quite naturally.

(ii) Communication is Critical Thinking.

Focus on obtaining answers above all else can sometimes be detrimental to students, who may reduce their learning outcomes to obtaining a specific answer or number. Learning is certainly a process and not an output; however it is by producing outputs out of the acquired skills that students allow themselves to critically think about the subject matter.

Therefore, my coursework has a significant portion of exercises and exams in which students are asked not only to explain and reproduce concepts that have been explained in class; but to apply these concepts to particular situation. Having worked in industry in which the work environment is inherently interdisciplinary, I require students to produce essays in which they are asked to explain their points of view to highly skilled professionals who may have never taken a class in Economics. This reinforces their ability to communicate their understanding without relying on jargon.

¹As inspired from Mayer (2002) and Ambrose et al. (2010).

² Excerpts are available upon request.

Mostly, I believe there is no learning if critical thinking isn't part of the process. Memorizing the steps is much different than knowing the path. I know the skills that are developed in the classroom will be useful in their professional lives much later than the end of each course; and these skills will only be there to be accessed and used if students are able to critically think about them.

(iii) Learning is dynamic, and so is the classroom.

Following pedagogical concepts such as the *learning pyramid*, comes the understanding that a unique method of exposure to content is bound to fail as a comprehensive learning experience. The objective of each and every activity employed within the classroom is to nudge the achievement of the students to their potential by using the *zone of proximal development* as described by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Throughout the duration of each course, I employ a variety of resources; such as: i) Self-written class-notes;³ slides, in-class exercises, student-lead group projects, Kahoot, classroom pedagogical games, exams and debates.

In my post [Using Kahoot in the Classroom](#) I explore the different learning processes reported within the learning pyramid as it relates to Kahoot. Similarly to this type of narrative, each and every classroom resource that is used has a thought process that is focused on students' experience and learning process behind it.

(iv) Grading, yes; but Assessment above all.

Grading is an inherent part of teaching, and within my courses it is no different. However, I understand grading, just as all other pedagogical sources, ought to serve a purpose within course design. Thus, assessment is incorporated into the course as not purely a way to ex-post evaluate students performance and rank them; but rather during the whole course, giving early feedback as to students likely development of the learning outcomes as well as to identify a growth path.

During my time at KU I have been fortunate to have been a Graduate Assessment Consultant for the Office of First Year Experience; in which I was involved with the evaluation and quantitative analysis of the Critical Thinking rubrics used on first year seminars across The University of Kansas.

I have certainly incorporated my knowledge of rubrics and assessment design into my courses. During projects students develop, I use rubrics for both presentations and written reports. Rubrics are available upon request.

In the pages that follow, I have included full description of courses taught, comments from students as well as complete summary statistics of my student evaluations.

³My class-notes are available to students in printed form prior to the beginning of the semester as part of their required course-pack. In elaborating and designing them, I've thoroughly thought in each chapter about introducing each model as described in section i) of this teaching statement, as well as providing students with solved examples, challenging exercises of various intensities that will test their understanding of the desired learning outcomes, and provide the necessary scaffolding for the semester. Additionally, by providing an organized and well-structured material from the get-go, it shifts the necessary responsibility to students to be in charge of their learning experience and be self-starters.

Table 1: Evidence of My Teaching Effectiveness from Key Summary Statistics of Student Evaluation

Criterion	Industrial Organization		Principles of Microeconomics	
	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Summer 2017
This instructor provided content and materials that were useful and organized	4.40	4.85	4.86	4.89
This instructor's teaching was clear, understandable and engaging	4.65	4.75	4.68	4.84
The instructor was encouraging, supportive and involved in my learning of the course material	4.70	4.85	4.95	4.89
The instructor was available responsive and helpful	4.75	4.90	4.91	4.95
The instructor demonstrated respect for students and their point of view	4.80	5.0	4.95	4.95
This instructor set and met clear goals and objectives for the course	4.65	4.90	4.82	4.95
What this instructor expected of me was well defined and fair	4.45	4.90	4.68	4.95
What this instructor expected of me was appropriately challenging	4.10	4.80	4.77	4.79
I acquired the knowledge and skills this course is intended to promote	4.63	4.90	4.68	4.68
My Average	4.57	4.87	4.81	4.88

Student Survey for Teaching at the University of Kansas uses a 1 - 5 scale for evaluating instructor: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree or Disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

Supplementary Pages: Summary of Teaching Evaluations

The University of Kansas conducts student teaching evaluations at the end of every semester. These feedback from students through the evaluations have shaped my teaching philosophy and improved my teaching effectiveness. I have included some comments from my students who took my Economic Development class; brief course description and my responsibilities for all the class I have taught and; my teaching evaluations which I have categorized into graduate teaching where I was a teaching assistant and undergraduate teaching where I was both a course instructor and a teaching assistant in two tables below. Analysis of my teaching evaluations demonstrate three key points of my teaching:

- (1) *My students have consistently rated my teaching performance very high in all categories;*
- (2) *I take special interest in my students and encourage productive learning; and*
- (3) *My commitment to my high research demands as a PhD student has not affected my commitment to teaching excellence.*

Comments from my Students in my Undergraduate Industrial Organization and Antitrust Policy class

- Hello Jessica, I've decided to forgo law school next semester to enter the work force and save money for a year instead. I enjoyed IO immensely and wanted to you to know that the course inspired me to pursue a legal career with the DOJ's anti-trust department. [...] I hope that your

doctoral studies are going well. If it pleases you to know, my biggest regret in undergrad was not winning coffee during your game theory lecture.

- The class project had me interacting with students across diverse backgrounds. My project helped me to understand the business better where I work at the water utility. The project along with the class material helped me to understand my company better as a whole so I'm able to give better input in our team meetings. My teacher gave me the confidence to pursue a higher level job within my company knowing the operating structure of a utility. Jessica was able to provide support in furthering my education for a graduate degree. She connected me with other students from class even after the semester was over so that I could stay networked with my peers.
- Thank you so much for the way you care about your students and the effort you put into all you do!
- I've recommended it to many of my friends.
- [I would recommend this class to a fellow student] if they have a good understanding of calculus and are interested in learning about real world scenarios [...] well taught and engaging.
- I cannot express enough my appreciation, Jessica!!! I am grateful for your help!!!

Below are brief description of classes that I have taught and my responsibilities in these classes. Student evaluations are provided for each of the classes that I have taught in the two tables that follow.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING

Course Instructor - Upper Level Course	<i>Student Evaluation out of 5</i>
INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION AND ANTITRUST POLICY, Spring 2018	
Fall 2017	4.81
Spring 2017	4.85
Fall 2016	4.57

Course Description: A 3 credit hour upper-level undergraduate course that examines the structure, conduct and performance of American industry applying the concepts and techniques of economic analysis. Topics covered include the theories of monopoly, competition and oligopoly, concentration, barriers to entry, price-fixing and other restrictive practices, mergers, technological change, and public regulation. The course also focuses on American antitrust law.

Course Instructor - Introductory Course	<i>Student Evaluation out of 5</i>
PRINCIPLES OF MICROECONOMICS, Summer 2017	4.88

Course Description: A 3 credit hour undergraduate course that is an analytical introduction to microeconomics. Topics include theory of markets, public policy, international trade, economic efficiency, and equity.

Teaching Assistant - Freshman Courses

PRINCIPLES OF MICROECONOMICS, *Fall 2014, Spring 2015*

Course Description: An introduction to modern economics designed primarily for students who do not plan to major in economics. Topics include economic history, the operation of economic institutions, and the formation and execution of economics policies to meet the current problems of the domestic and international economy.

INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMICS, *Spring 2016*

Course Description: An analytical introduction to macroeconomics. Topics include determination of

aggregate income, employment, inflation, exchange rates, and the role of fiscal and monetary policy in dealing with unemployment, inflation, and economic growth.

The next page provides summary tables of student evaluations for all the classes I have taught.

Table 2: Introductory Course Evaluations

Criterion	Course Instructor	Teaching Assistant		
	Principles Micro. Summer 2017	Principles of Micro. Fall 2014	Principles of Micro. Spring 2015	Intro. to Economics Spring 2016
This instructor provided content and materials that were useful and organized	4.89	3.96	3.51	4.72
This instructor's teaching was clear, understandable and engaging	4.84	3.61	3.25	4.62
The instructor was encouraging, supportive and involved in my learning of the course material	4.89	4.12	3.58	4.51
The instructor was available responsive and helpful	4.95	4.13	3.81	4.66
The instructor demonstrated respect for students and their point of view	4.95	4.29	4.18	4.77
This instructor set and met clear goals and objectives for the course	4.95	3.82	3.80	4.49
What this instructor expected of me was well defined and fair	4.95	3.95	3.86	4.59
What this instructor expected of me was appropriately challenging	4.79	3.97	3.84	4.51
I acquired the knowledge and skills this course is intended to promote	4.68	3.81	3.81	4.63
My Average	4.88			

Student Survey for Teaching at the University of Kansas uses a 1 - 5 scale forevaluating instructor: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree or Disagree,(4)Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

Table 3: Advanced Course Evaluations

Criterion	Course Instructor Advanced Courses				
	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2018
This instructor provided content and materials that were useful and organized	4.40	4.85	4.86	4.71	
This instructor's teaching was clear, understandable and engaging	4.65	4.75	4.68	4.71	
The instructor was encouraging, supportive and involved in my learning of the course material	4.70	4.85	4.95	4.71	
The instructor was available responsive and helpful	4.75	4.90	4.91	4.83	
The instructor demonstrated respect for students and their point of view	4.80	5.0	4.95	4.79	
This instructor set and met clear goals and objectives for the course	4.65	4.90	4.82	4.63	
What this instructor expected of me was well defined and fair	4.45	4.90	4.68	4.75	
What this instructor expected of me was appropriately challenging	4.10	4.80	4.77	4.67	
I acquired the knowledge and skills this course is intended to promote	4.63	4.90	4.68	4.63	
My Average	4.57	4.87	4.81	4.72	

Student Survey for Teaching at the University of Kansas uses a 1 - 5 scale for evaluating instructor: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree or Disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.