

Teaching Evidence and Philosophy

My professional teaching experience includes teaching and lecturing at both teaching assistant and full instructor level in seven different universities, both public and private, and in four different countries, at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

In Xalapa, State of Veracruz, Mexico, right after I got my bachelor's degree in Economics, I was informally involved in small teaching assistant assignments, both in the Economics Department at the University of Veracruz (helping Dr. Rey Acosta Barradas, former Department Chair) and in the Institute for Historical and Social Research, also in the University of Veracruz (helping Dr. Feliciano Garcia Aguirre, coordinator of the PhD in History and Regional Studies) This teaching activities, while informal, were useful in preparing me in dealing with large groups of students and in general, they constituted for me a preliminary view of what professionally teaching is.

Later on (Fall 2000), in Santiago, Chile, while I was conducting a graduate program in Applied Macroeconomics, in the Economics Department of the Catholic University of Chile, I was teaching assistant to Dr. Felipe Zurita for the undergraduate Microeconomics course.

Subsequently, I served as Instructor with full responsibilities in:

- University of Veracruz, Xalapa, Mexico. Economics Department. Instructor of Econometrics I, Econometrics II. From Spring 2002 to Spring 2003. Undergraduate course.
- University of Xalapa, Xalapa, Mexico. Business and Economics Department. Instructor of International Finance. Fall 2002. Undergraduate course.
- University Cristobal Colon, Veracruz, Mexico. Finance Department. Instructor of International Finance. Fall 2002. Graduate (Master of Finance) course.
- University of Florida, Gainesville, USA. Food and Resource Economics Department. Instructor for AEB 2014, Economic Issues, Food and You. Fall 2006. Undergraduate course.
- University of Concepcion, Concepcion, Chile. Industrial Engineering Department. Acted as Visiting Professor for two courses, Microeconomics at undergrad level, and International Finance II at graduate level, in the MBA of the University of Concepcion.
- American University, Asuncion, Paraguay. Business Department. Visiting Professor for the course of International Business at graduate level, in the MBA of the American University.

I will provide further details to the course AEB 2014, since it was the first time I had to teach in a language other than my native Spanish. It represented several difficulties since it was an undergraduate introductory course and I understood I should not use a single mathematical equation, something I would prefer not just because I love math but because it meant I had to speak continually, three hours a week, in English. So I had to come up with many examples to illustrate concepts. I'm attaching a copy of my Teaching Review. My Instructor Evaluation results were pretty much the same if compared within our College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (Mean of 4.22 ver-

sus a mean of 4.25 for the whole CALS, both with exactly the same standard deviation of 0.92). I would like to add ALL of the comments I got in that class. Most of them are positive:

1. Mr. Pitta enjoys the topic of economics, and transmit that to his students. I enjoyed the subject matter more because of his enthusiasm for economics.
2. He was very willing to assist students with concerns and always did what he could to help students.
3. Mr. Pitta made the extra effort to improve our grades and make sure we understood the material.
4. He is obviously “into” economics. Can’t say he doesn’t have enough enthusiasm!
5. Mr. Pitta really knew what he was talking about and always gave great examples to illustrate difficult concepts.
6. Information was always available and easy to access.
7. I was very appreciative of all the materials provided by Mr. Pitta. There were more than enough resources to adequately learn the material.
8. It is very rare to find caring, motivated, compassionate teachers. He is all three, and he makes learning enjoyable.
9. Overall, the course was fun. I learned a lot.
10. He is very enthusiastic about the material. Always happy and responded well to student’s questions.
11. The course material does not explain things that well. I still needed the instructor to help me.
12. His different methods to explain a subject helped me in this field tremendously.
13. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable (sic), genuine concern for students and their success, respectful, appropriate and funny! One of my favorites, always prepared.
14. Book was expensive but he allowed us to purchase older editions.
15. There was a minor language barrier (more enunciations), and some of the examples were oddly worded so it confuses us.

As for the materials used in class, I try as much as I can to provide links between practical applications and the theoretical concepts introduced in class. Also, I always try to find in the media current events related to materials covered in class. Pedagogically I try to stimulate active discussion in the classroom, because I really think discussion is an excellent tool for student to develop his/her own ideas, and to actively relate the materials presented in class with their own life, world perspective and personal beliefs.

With regards to my teaching philosophy, I think one of the most important things for me is to be always available for the students. Open office hours whenever possible, promptly respond emails, add as much helping material as possible in the website so if a student feels like study at 2am in the morning she can do it. Also, I try to be nice and approachable, so that I can provide an environment where the student feels comfortable discussing material.

I also think that showing respect and real concern for the students is a cornerstone for being an excellent teacher. Students really care about their education, and most of them are continually doing the hard work required to understand the material we as teachers present. I know, because I am a student as well. So we must show respect to them: not everybody loves economics, or whatever subject we love and teach. But they borrow us their time, they do the extra work of being there lecture after lecture, reading what we want them to read, writing about what we tell them to, and doing all this stuff that maybe they don't enjoy doing. And we have to recognize and reward their hard work. And, at the end of the day, if you genuinely care for how the students are progressing, it will pay off. Students will notice it, they will be more productive, and we'll be happier because we will teach, and they will learn, and maybe most importantly, they will incorporate what they have learned in their world view.

We know from basic microeconomics that happiness would be by itself the ultimate goal, and we need to maximize it. Under the assumption that you love to teach, you maximize happiness by teaching. So you teach, you have good results, and then you are happier, and that should be good by itself. Teaching ergo happiness. Of course this result depends upon both the teaching function shape, and whether the assumption holds!

It can be proved (in a forthcoming worthless paper dealing with concavity) that, under reasonable circumstances, an optimum must exist *regardless* of the shape of the teaching function. So maybe it is time to remember that we decided to be agricultural economist just because it made us happy *per se*, just because of the pure sense of learning an exciting new field. I can still memorize that primordial happy feeling when I read "My envy goes out to the reader, setting out to explore the exciting world of economics for the first time... may I only say, *bon appetit!*" from Samuelson's 11th Ed. of his Principles of Economics textbook. I was 16 then, but I knew he was exaggerating.

My teaching philosophy includes being passionate about teaching. I try to show enthusiasm and passion every time, with every example and every lecture I give, even every test both students and I have to endure. Of course that's easy because showing my students why I choose to study what I did, why economics is so completely amazing and omnipresent in every decision we make, every day in our life, is almost self evident. But I think that if you show passion, students will notice. They may even enjoy learning as much as you enjoy teaching. And then sure, the assumption will hold, and that basic microeconomic result will be correct.

And as for Samuelson, he wasn't exaggerating.

Sincerely,

Carlos Raul Pitta Arcos