

Jonathan Hersh
Department of Economics, Boston U
jhersh@bu.edu
jonathan-hersh.com

Teaching Statement

My teaching philosophy is informed by my experiences as a student at The University of Chicago and Boston University and in teaching at the graduate and undergraduate level. I am currently a lecturer at MIT, where I teach a PhD course in quantitative methods (generalized linear models, intro to Bayesian inference) in the department of political science. I was previously a lecturer at Wellesley College where I taught courses in development economics and introductory microeconomics.

The highest priority I have in teaching is creating an inclusive learning environment in which students of all abilities feel comfortable participating to the classroom environment. Participation engages students' minds and creates incentives to follow class material closely. The last thing I want is for students to be discouraged from contributing out of fear of being shamed by the instructor or fellow classmates. By nature I'm an inclusive person, but I take extra care when responding to student's comments that I don't unintentionally discourage them from contributing in the future. I seek to create an environment in which everyone in the classroom feels comfortable failing. I don't present myself as some all-knowing sage, but show that learning is a process.

Often the most challenging aspect with any course is managing heterogeneity in student abilities. This is often the most challenging in an introductory course, where student abilities are more varied. Often this can be solved by being aware of cues when students appear to not be absorbing certain material, and being flexible in the length of time it takes to cover certain material. I aim to teach to the middle of the class in terms of abilities. For highly able students, I often provide optional readings for those who want more depth. For students in the lower end of the distribution, I encourage them with learning strategies culled from my own educational experiences, make myself available for office hours, and/or encourage them to make use of subject-specific tutoring services. I want my courses to be challenging, but I also want my students to feel like I am their coach – cheering them on, providing the resources and strategies they need to succeed.

At Wellesley, it was challenging to encourage participation from more shy students. Since a key component of my development economics course was the classroom discussion, I had to develop some strategy to encourage more equitable student participation. The solution I came to was to provide students with handouts accompanying reading with questions I might ask in class. I then drew students' names without replacement out of a hat, which equally distributed students' responses. This would be infeasible at a classroom of sufficient size, and patronizing for non-undergraduate courses, but in this setting it worked well.

I believe in frequent measurement of both my students and my own performance. Prior to teaching at Wellesley, I read *Make It Stick* [1], which showed convincing evidence that frequent testing is preferable to end-of-semester testing for long-term knowledge retention. I applied this at Wellesley and later at MIT, where I have no final exam and utilize monthly quizzes rather than mid-semester and final exams. In examining my own performance, I often ask students informally what they think is working about the course, and what can be improved. I send anonymous mid-semester surveys that asks students those exact questions, and often adjust my strategy mid-semester to refocus.

It's a privilege to teach at any level, and I treat it as such. It's a way to stay connected to the big questions in my discipline. It's practice for condensing big ideas and seeing the big picture.

References

- [1] Brown, P. C., Roediger, H. L., & McDaniel, M. A. (2014). *Make it stick*. Harvard University Press.