

Teaching

ECON 73010: Research & Writing Seminar I

Eric Sims

University of Notre Dame

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Readings and Assignments

Reading:

- ▶ For today: [Allgood, Walstad, and Siefried \(2015\)](#)
- ▶ For next time: [Cawley \(2018\)](#), [Guren \(2015\)](#), [Laibson](#)

Assignment:

- ▶ Prepare 15-minute teaching demonstration (with slides) on topic of your choosing (undergraduate level)

Teaching

For students who place into academia, teaching will be an important part of their professional lives

Particularly outside of the very top, teaching is an important thing potential employers are looking at and plays a role in promotion and tenure decisions

Having good teaching evaluations as a graduate student will help you get a job

I believe teaching and research are **complements**:

- ▶ Teaching will make you a better economist and a better researcher
- ▶ It will give you research ideas as well

*“If you only like philosophy, then be a philosopher.
If you only like history, then be a historian. If you
only like mathematics, then be a mathematician.
But if you like all of these things, you should be an
economist.”*

Undergraduate Economics Major

The economics major is popular at most US colleges and universities

At Notre Dame, it is particularly popular:

- ▶ At present, we have close to 1000 majors (economics and international economics)
- ▶ About one-seventh of ND students leave with a degree from our department
- ▶ About two-thirds of all undergraduates at the university take principles of micro

Many students double major (finance, accounting, math, ACMS, political science, and others)

Undergraduate Curriculum

An economics degree has a well-defined core. Students spend much of their time learning tools and the language – i.e. “how to think like an economist” – before studying specific topics

1. Principles of micro and macro
2. Intermediate micro and macro
3. Statistics and econometrics

At Notre Dame, students are required to take four additional electives

Ours is unlike most majors, that don't have as many tools and core courses, and focus on topics earlier on

Graduate education is structured in the same way

Gender

Economics is male-dominated

At the undergraduate level, nationally about 30 percent of majors are women

This is true at Notre Dame as well

Around the same number of new PhDs are women as well

This ends up being manifested in faculty, too

The gender gap starts early – women tend to not take introductory economics courses at the same rate men do. See [Buckles \(2019\)](#)

Instructional Style

Especially for the core classes, economics is predominantly lecture-based

This is my preference, too, and fits with the nature of what we are doing in those classes

More advanced courses tend to be more discussion-based and interactive

Student Participation

Even in core classes, it is good to try to foster student engagement

Some effective ways:

1. Clickers
2. Small-group problem-solving
3. Experiments
4. “Flipped” classrooms

Most research suggests online education is not as effective as in-person. See [Kofoed et al \(2021\)](#)

Slides

For almost all courses these days, it is expected to have slides

For constructing slides, same rules for presentations apply

For most courses, I think it is important to do work on the board (or a stylus, if you prefer)

- ▶ Students need to see problems worked out, curves shifted, etc.
- ▶ It also slows you down

Aim for working through examples on board, giving big picture overview on slides. Do not 100 percent rely on slides

Teaching Evaluations

At Notre Dame, teaching evaluations are administered through Course Instructor Feedback (CIF) surveys

Very similar at nearly all institutions

To be considered “good,” you need a composite median CIF ≥ 4

- ▶ 90 percent of our department's CIFs are in this range

Problems with Teaching Evaluations

Teaching evaluations are an imperfect measure of teaching effectiveness

Can be a popularity contest, potentially biased against women and underrepresented groups

Still, universities use them, and potential employers will look at yours when you apply and when you go up for promotion

Not a ton of gain to being in the far right tail, but penalty to having “bad” evaluations

CIF Regressions, F2018-F2022

$$CIF_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 enrollment_{i,t} + \beta_2 elective_{i,t} + \beta_3 grad_{i,t} + \beta_4 challenge_{i,t} + FE_i + TE_t + e_{i,t}$$

Coefficient on enrollment is negative (mildly significant), elective is positive (insignificant), graduate is positive and significant, challenge is positive and significant

- ▶ Students at Notre Dame like more challenging courses!

FE Regressions, F2018-F2022

$$FE_i = \alpha + \beta_1 female_i + \beta_2 esl_i + \beta_3 tf_i + e_{i,t}$$

Coefficient on female is positive, small, and insignificant

- ▶ no evidence of gender bias in our department

Coefficient on non-native speakers is large, negative, and statistically significant

Coefficient on teaching faculty (as opposed to tenure-track) is large, positive, and statistically significant

What Do Students Value When Doing Evaluations

In my experience:

1. Clarity and organization
2. Impartiality and fairness
3. Availability
4. Challenge: students here want to be challenged, so long as you help them and are fair

The Number One Input

In my view, the number one input to effective teaching: **wanting to teach well**

Students can sense if you want to be there and are excited, or if you view teaching as a drag

You will do okay if the students think you want to teach, want them to do well, and are trying to offer a good course

They will penalize you if not

Other Tips for Effective Teaching

1. Learn everyone's names and potentially something about each student
2. Don't be afraid to start class with a joke or brief discussion about something happening in the world
3. Be available – encourage students to grab lunch with you or get a coffee
4. Be very organized
5. Give them plenty of study materials for exams; don't throw them for a loop

Teaching Experience in Grad School

You should all get at least one opportunity to get formal evaluations as a TA

If you do well, teaching your own class later on can be very valuable

Doing well as sole instructor can be a very valuable signal to a wide swath of the academic market

But it's also risky – doing poorly can hurt you, and teaching your own class for the first time can be very time-consuming