

Alexander C. Cartwright  
Teaching Philosophy

My teachers created the most exciting and influential moments in my life. Their passion and energy for ideas, disciplined by intellectual honesty and critical reasoning, ignited a curiosity and happiness in me. I teach so that I can ignite a similar passion in my students; a passion for them to take ownership over their own learning, expand the capacities of their individual minds, and carry that passion with them beyond the academy.

All of my teaching emphasizes learning the economic way of thinking. The consistent and persistent application of opportunity cost reasoning is a style of reasoning with nearly infinite applications and extensions; thus, mastery requires a great deal of practice. Student's initial attempts to use the economic way of thinking will likely be imprecise. My job is to provide them with opportunities to practice this skill while also demonstrating the rewards that come from mastering it.

My teaching philosophy is a direct extension of my intellectual roots as an economist. Just as how the many types of social orders outside the classroom appear to have been intelligently designed though they are merely the products of human interaction, ideas and knowledge are products of the learning process: a conversation between student and teacher, not the mere instruction from a teacher that students are expected to see as an expert. To that end, my approach to teaching is focused on creating a dialogue between everyone in the classroom; this also allows me to get constant feedback on students needs.

I only lecture with the purpose of ensuring that everyone has a common knowledge base on the foundational concepts required to have a conversation so that we can think about the implications of those ideas together. In applying the economic way of thinking, I emphasize applying what we have learned to real world events and not highly theoretical problems. In an effort to have students take ownership of their learning, I use daily quizzes on basic ideas from assigned readings and the previous class material. Homework questions are designed to challenge students to be independent learners; thus, they are not assigned or collected each class period. Because students are given an extended time to complete the Homework, I encourage them to meet with me for clarification and instruction and emphasize that 'office hours' are in fact 'student hours'. All of my assignments include at least one open-ended element where students are asked to call of their creative skills to imagine applications and, in advanced courses, extensions of our class material.

A strong foundation in sound economic reasoning is essential for understanding human action, and using that understanding to make the informed public policy decisions that our democratic system demands. Because the consequences of failing to understand the economic way or thinking are so large, I am committed to ensuring that students understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various perspectives in economics. Instilling in students a passion for applying the economic way of thinking while disciplining themselves with critical reasoning and intellectual honesty is my core role as their professor; that's a role I am proud of and hold in high regard.