

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

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The following provides evidence of my teaching effectiveness using teaching evaluations, student feedback, and brief descriptions of my challenges and responses within my courses. Each institution has its own unique section after my brief summary, listed from present to past.

Summary

My course evaluations have consistently been above average, with noticeable improvement since I began teaching in the summer of 2012. Across my three prior teaching engagements, I have garnered scores of 4.73, 4.74, and 4.88 on a 5-point scale for instructor quality. In part, I believe this is because I have worked hard to incorporate feedback and value all students' opinions of the course, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. These continuous efforts to improve have been rewarded through three teaching awards at my previous institutions: the Phi Eta Sigma Teaching Award (Oxford College--2019), the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award (Colorado State University Economics Department--2016), and the Excellence in Teaching Award (Colorado State University School of Liberal Arts--2013).

Oxford College of Emory University: Fall 2017--Present

Oxford College uses IDEA course evaluation forms (<https://www.ideaedu.org/>), which not only illicit student feedback, but also serve as a ranking system to compare instructors across and within institutions. Instructors must rank various learning objectives as either: 1) Essential; 2) Important; or 3) Minor/No Importance, prior to delivering course evaluation forms to students. These rankings are then matched with student responses to rank the instructor based on their progress towards relevant objectives as compared to others teaching the same course, others in the same discipline, and others at the same institution (regardless of discipline). Tables 1 and 2 show my scores from student responses and relative rankings compared with instructors at other institutions in the IDEA database for that academic semester, respectively.

Table 1: Course Survey Results: Weighted Mean Scores from Fall 2017--Spring 2019

Category	Score
Excellent Teacher	4.73
Progress on Relevant Objectives	4.71
Excellent Course	4.47
Evaluation Summary	4.71

Notes: Scores weighted by number of students in each course. 5 or 4 = "Substantial or Exceptional Progress"; 3 = "Average"; 2 or 1 = "Slight or No Progress"

While my choice of learning objectives varied across each course, most contained some combination of: 1) Gaining factual knowledge; 2) Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories; 3) Learning to apply course material; and 4) Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field. The above table demonstrates that students believed I was successful in guiding them to these objectives as they felt they made either substantial or exceptional progress. The IDEA forms also rank instructors within the IDEA system that are teaching the same course. These rankings are derived by comparing instructor within-course progress towards learning objectives, relative to progress made by other instructors. These relative instructor scores are then standardized to a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 to determine the ranking of a given instructor. These scores and their interpretation are in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Course Survey Results: Weighted Mean Scores from Fall 2017--Spring 2019

Category	Score	Interpretation of Ranking
Excellent Teacher	58.31	Highest 30%
Progress on Relevant Objectives	64.41	Highest 10%
Excellent Course	59.25	Highest 30%
Evaluation Summary	61.95	Highest 30%

Notes: Scores weighted by number of students in each course. Scale is as follows: 63 or more indicates a teacher is in the Highest 10% of teachers teaching a course, 56-62 indicates they are in the Next 20%, 45-55 indicates they are similar to the average teacher (Middle 40% of rankings), 38-44 indicates they are below average (Next Lowest 20%), and lower than 37 indicates a teacher is in the lowest 10% of instructors.

In tandem with Table 1, Table 2 shows that I have been particularly effective in conveying the learning objectives for each course, and then guiding students to them. My raw rankings are all in the top 30% of instructors, with students viewing our collective progress towards relevant course objectives as outstanding.¹

The next two sections dive deeper into the results of these tables at Oxford College. I provide a representative sample of reviews and then a short narrative about what has worked, what did not work, and what I hope to improve in the future.

Sample of Qualitative Evaluations²

All grammatical errors are left unedited and quoted directly from student reviews. I have sorted the qualitative evaluations by course to better see how reviews might differ across courses.

¹Adjusted rankings, which account for how likable a course is, show that I am in the highest 30% for all of the categories with the exception of “Excellent Course” where my ranking falls to the Middle 40%. All rankings remain above the mean of 50.

²A full set of evaluations is available upon request.

ECON 302--Development of Economic Thought

“Great course, think it could be helpful to assign less reading since we cover a lot of topics in class.”

“One of the best professors I have had here at Oxford. Explains things clearly & concisely and is engaged. Professor Blake is the man. I cannot say that enough.”

“Admiration on Dr. Blake’s knowledge on various subjects.”

ECON 201--Intermediate Microeconomics

“Dr. Blake is by far the best economics teacher that I have had. Perhaps there is no teacher that is more accessible and better at explaining material than Dr. Blake is. I’d love for him to stay at Oxford so that future generations can receive his instruction. Bright mind with an even brighter future in teaching/research.”

“Test 2 is so hard.”

“Dr. Blake is the best Econ professor I’ve ever seen.”

ECON 101--Principles of Microeconomics

“I really liked the papers--they were a fun and easy way to connect economics to the real world. I loved the class, Dr. Blake is an excellent professor.”

“The weekly papers + graded homework were very useful when reviewing the chapter. You were very good and helpful with your office hours.”

“I really enjoyed how Dr. Blake was able to take complex concepts and simplify them as well as relate them to our own lives. He is a phenomenal teacher and would definitely recommend his class.”

Summary of Evaluations

There are two common themes to the vast majority of my student evaluations from Oxford College. The first is that students tended to acknowledge the difficulty of the course (I design my tests, in particular, to be challenging), and yet feel the course was worthy of their time and energy. In one unquoted review, a student noted that I was able to make them feel good about their progress, even if they did not earn the A they wanted. These sorts of comments are important to me as my teaching approach will always seek to empower students. Regardless of their grade, I want them to feel successful about their academic journey. A combination of being available during office hours,

striving to be approachable, and acknowledging students' hard work have all been instrumental in receiving this feedback.

The second vein evident throughout the reviews is that students enjoy the assignments I offer that challenge them to apply knowledge. As noted in my Teaching Statement, this is important to me as I want students to use the knowledge they can to critically approach the world. Through targeted writing assignments, in-class discussions, and frequent examples during lectures, the reviews suggest that I have been successful in showing students the value of what we learn.

Colorado State University (CSU): Summer 2012--Spring 2017

CSU uses a more straightforward and common form of student evaluations. Reviews were only made available to me from Summer 2012 to Fall 2016. Table 3 shows the aggregated scores for my courses over this period.

Table 3: Course Survey Results: Weighted Mean Scores from Summer 2012--Fall 2016

Category	Score
Instructor Rating	4.74
Communication of Course Objectives	4.54
Communication of Grading System	4.51
Value of Class Sessions	4.51
Value of Reading Assignments	3.99
Value of Other Assignments	4.15
Value of Learning Resources	4.20
Organization of Course Website	4.23
Intellectual Challenge of Course	4.19
Instructor's Knowledge of Course Material	4.83
Instructor's Ability to Facilitate Learning	4.66
Instructor Enthusiasm	4.74
Course Organization	4.64
Instructor Preparation	4.73
Instructor Ability to Manage Class Sessions	4.70
Instructor Ability to Manage Online Communications	4.34
Instructor Fairness	4.67
Respectful Atmosphere	4.72
Instructor Communication	4.70
Instructor Availability	4.56

Notes: Scores weighted by number of students in each course. 5 = "Excellent", 4 = "Above Average", 3 = "Average", 2 = "Below Average", 1 = "Poor"

The most evident result of Table 3 is that students noted my enthusiasm and preparation, ability to manage class sessions with respect, and ability to facilitate learning. As with Oxford College, the next two sections provide a sample of evaluations and brief discussion.

Sample of Qualitative Evaluations

All grammatical errors are left unedited and quoted directly from student reviews.

ECON 335--Introduction to Econometrics

“This is my second course which I have taken with Chris Blake. They have been two of the best class experiences I have had at CSU to date. He manages class with ease, is knowledgeable, and very entertaining. Made Econometrics exciting, simple, and in some ways fun.”

“Instructor did a great job overall. Course was challenging but not impossible. Assignments helped a lot in understanding the material.”

“The instructor was good about adding video for the gretl demo if someone asked for more videos.”

ECON 304--Intermediate Macroeconomics

“Very relatable, knowledgeable and available outside of class. Wished more Professors cared as much as Chris. Very genuine when addressing problems, grades, etc. Best Grad student I have come across in 3 1/2 years of college.”

“Chris Blake is a great teacher. He is very invested in his students. He works to make sure students have a real understanding of the material. If someone is struggling he helps and goes above and beyond expectations to help students succeed. I love his class. You can tell he has a passion for the subject. He is funny and makes class enjoyable. He probably needs a raise.”

“Chris is a solid teacher for this class. His modern view of economics kept the class interesting. The online homework system was difficult to [review] once you completed the assignment. The tests were hard but fair. I enjoyed this class.”

ECON 202--Principles of Microeconomics

“Blake writing out notes as he did was very helpful then the pace was not too fast or too slow. Examples for each topic also were very helpful. I really liked the writing assignment topics—it was nice to choose something I was interested in because it ended up making me learn a lot more about the topic.”

“This was one of the best classes I’ve taken; you both did a phenomenal job at keeping it interesting.”

“I had to take this class again. I learned a lot more this time around. Good job!”

“He was a great instructor. His style of teaching while taking notes with us really helped me.”

“All the material was well-explained and even the awkward silences were handled well.”

“Chris is a great instructor—very prompt at answering emails and questions. Communicates great”

“Writing the notes helped me a lot so I could learn all material”

“I really enjoyed this class, it made me briefly consider switching my major to Econ. You’re a great teacher and I have learned really well from you.”

ECON 204--Principles of Macroeconomics

“I have not fallen asleep once in this class, and I usually sleep through at least 1 class per day.”

“I thought the instructor did a great job and I recommend his class to others.”

“I really appreciated your effort in trying to get us to interact with you even when we rarely responded. In all honesty, more professors should, as you have, attempt to get us to explain what we have learned rather than just learning to upchuck it on our tests. Thank you!”

“Chris is one of the best professors that I have had. He is very effective at teaching and conveying information in lecture. But even more importantly, his enthusiasm in the class actually makes it enjoyable to come to lecture.”

“I appreciate how Chris does not use PowerPoint presentations. By actually having to write down what he does, it better helps me as a student to remember the information lectured on. He is very enthusiastic and makes lecture enjoyable.”

“Chris Blake did a fantastic job. Not only was he a flawless teacher in Macro but the way he taught the class made it so damn interesting and made me fall in love with macro econ through the enthusiasm and knowledge of his for Econ. I recommend him. Awesome teacher. Period.”

“I really liked the way this course was taught. It was encouraging to go to class when the instructor puts as much effort into planning as I do with homework/studying.”

“I really enjoyed this class and professor. I emailed him a lot and always got a fast response. I enjoyed coming to class and Chris made a dry subject very interesting. Overall, great-teacher and course.”

Summary of Evaluations

Generally, my reviews show that students most enjoy the energy of the class and clarity. Most students cite my clear communication, both inside and outside of class. Students like my style of writing notes with them on paper rather than presenting via PowerPoints. This comment has carried over to Oxford College as well--particularly from first- and second-year students who could

use some guidance on how to effectively take notes. Students also often noted my availability in office hours and email, frequently using these resources to advance their understanding of topics.

While not shown here, several reviews also show that a clear source of potential improvement lies in slowing down. The frequency of this critique has diminished in recent semesters as it became a focal point for me in my first years teaching. Earlier reviews also suggested more examples while presenting course material. To the first critique, writing notes out on the board has helped me to slow down and give students time to internalize material. To the second critique, I have worked to include more relevant examples and the frequency of requests for more has diminished.

Finally, the reviews demonstrate that students were again happy with the difficulty of the course. They felt challenged, but never felt discouraged throughout the semester. This is a strength I hope to retain throughout my teaching career.

Front Range Community College (FRCC): Fall 2013--Spring 2016

While teaching at CSU and finishing my graduate degree, I also taught two classes per semester at FRCC. This is where I believe my true development as a teacher occurred as the student demographic was decidedly different than anywhere else I have ever taught. As a community college, the age-range within a given course featured everyone from advanced high school students to older adults returning to school during a career change. Ultimately, this disparity in age led me to see teaching as a skill rooted in “reading a room.” The ability to understand where students will struggle and how students of different demographics will experience differing struggles is paramount to teaching success. Admittedly, there was a learning curve for me as I developed this skill. This resulted in lower review scores earlier in my time at FRCC with a marked increase in reviews as I adapted my teaching strategies and better gained the skill to understand students. Table 4 shows the aggregated scores for my courses during my time at FRCC.

Table 4: Course Survey Results: Weighted Mean Scores from Fall 2013--Spring 2016

Category	Score
Course readings supported the overall objectives of the course.	4.01
My professor was regularly prepared.	4.83
My professor treated me with respect.	4.88
Course materials were clear.	4.63
The feedback from my professor was helpful.	4.57

Notes: Scores weighted by number of students in each course. Spring 2013 reviews were not available due to a system transfer that semester. 5 = “Strongly Agree”, 4 = “Agree”, 3 = “Neutral”, 2 = “Disagree”, 1 = “Strongly Disagree”

Table 4 supports the reviews I have received at Oxford College and CSU with respect to preparation, respect, and clarity. At surface level, nothing is really of note in the table except for the score on course readings, which is quite low. Individual qualitative evaluations shed light on these results.

Sample of Qualitative Evaluations

All grammatical errors are left unedited and quoted directly from student reviews.

ECO 201--Principles of Macroeconomics

“Always links good examples to real life. Simplifies material appropriately. Always asks if we are understanding material.”

“Very knowledgeable on the subject and passionate about it which made the class interesting. He was also very laid back and funny which helped. Very flexible. I know abbreviations are often used a lot in this class but its impossible to memorize them all which makes notes hard to understand.”

“Very clear in his teachings, concepts were easily understandable. More feedback on tests/papers.”

“Well spoken, knows the material he teaches. Most certainly an asset to the economics department and students.”

“He is very clear and concise and does a good job of explaining the material. The papers do a good job of allowing students to apply things learned in class.”

“Easy to listen to, lectures were easy to follow, logical, and well-explained in a fun classroom environment. Review days were super helpful, work sheets helped a lot, possibly provide more review material/study guides for practice.”

“Easy to talk to/easy to understand. Good at explaining material or making boring material a little more interesting. Love the shell notes.”

“Knows the subject matter top to bottom. Able to interpret questions and provide relevant response in the framework of the macroeconomic view.”

ECO 202--Principles of Microeconomics

“Enthusiastic about the topic. Possible better review and study material for exams.”

“Knows the course material really well. Smart guy. Keeps lectures light hearted.”

“Clear in teaching. Answers questions effectively. Grades fair. Not too much unnecessary work.”

“Always organized, funny, showed the most respect to students out of any professor I had.”

Summary of Evaluations

More so than CSU, students critiqued the speed of the course. In early semesters, I was a little more rigid in scheduling and movement through material. This made it difficult, especially for adult students who had to relearn how best to approach academic coursework. Furthermore, by going too fast and ignoring hangups, I was depriving students of the clarity and intuition they needed to critically approach the material. Ultimately, I made the choice that, if necessary, it was better for students to truly understand a few important topics than only have a cursory understanding of many topics. As a result, when students struggled I adapted significantly--sometimes stopping class entirely to review and reteach material so as to not lose some students along the way. In this regard, I developed a greater sense of how to read the classroom through my experiences at FRCC.

There is also a clear pattern of improvement at FRCC in other regards. The categories corresponding to course reading, course material, and feedback were my lowest scores. It seemed that students disliked the department choice of textbook early and the department's move to a free, open-source textbook in 2015 was met with mixed reviews. To better improve the clarity of course materials, I revised my syllabus and its organization in 2014. In addition, I began providing "shell notes"—a version of my lecture notes with only definitions and graphs in addition to space for note taking. The goal of this was to allow students to focus on material while it was being presented, knowing they could always find graphs and definitions in my notes. For those who planned to transition to a four-year collegiate experience, these shell notes also served as a guide through which they learned how to take better notes. Feedback from both of these changes was exceptionally positive and was reflected in a modest increase in my average score for this category (4.59 to 4.63).

With regard to my provision of feedback, it is clear that students wanted more. I began using explicit rubrics to grade and wrote detailed comments on papers which rose my score in this category from an average of 4.26 to 4.65. Despite the increase in effort, the frequency of this critique remained the same and it seemed that a significant portion of students were not viewing the comments I made (the online platform informed me when students read the feedback). I have continued to work on systems to incentivize students reviewing their feedback, however the results have been mixed so far.

Overall, a lot of the positive comments mirrored those of CSU—namely the energy put into the course and clarity of lectures. Students also seemed to enjoy my attempts to keep lecture lighthearted, given that these course were usually between 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm--a time when energy usually begins to fade, especially for working adults.