

Bethany College
Box 103 • Bethany, WV 26032
dyoungberg@bethanywv.edu • (563) 340-3398

Teaching as a conversation.

The essence of my best teaching and learning experiences is discussion between faculty and students about a great idea. By engaging students, I create an environment where people learn through both lecture and conversation. Students are not empty vessels to be filled. They have assumptions and attitudes that affect their opinions on a subject, especially in the field of economics. Forging a genuine dialogue ensures that an idea becomes truly theirs so students take it with them long after class is over.

My courses employ a wide variety of techniques to illustrate concepts including trade, supply and demand, and the tragedy of the commons. In managerial economics, I demonstrate the winner's curse by auctioning off a jar of pennies. I create an in-class currency market so students can observe how different stimuli change the exchange rates that emerge while they trade. I use i-clickers to give students an immediate opportunity to check their understanding and discuss concepts with peers. Students not only develop a sense of how much material they actually understand, this technique addresses the challenge of teaching to students with diverse academic backgrounds and abilities. Well-performing students strengthen their knowledge as they discuss the problem. Struggling students gain helpful explanations from someone who has recently mastered the material. Students particularly enjoy this technique and I find it very useful for assessing which areas need additional clarification.

In my classes students get excited about economics as they discover the explanatory power of the discipline. In principles of microeconomics, students learn how elasticity explains why gun buyback programs are ineffective and why companies issue coupons instead of having a sale. I reinforce these lessons with course readings from Robert Frank's *The Economic Naturalist*, which uses introductory economics to answer everyday puzzles (e.g., why drive-up ATMs have Braille on the keypads). I require students to find their own puzzles and answer them. I have received a wide variety of responses over the years—from “why cruises offer alcohol and soda for free” to “why high school friends don't make good college roommates”—as students question their world in ways I had never considered.

Instruction does not end at the classroom door; I make out-of-class resources available to students so I can make the most of our in-class time. Beyond being available via text messaging, e-mail, and office hours, I post lecture notes and practice tests on my website. Putting notes online allows students to participate in the discussion rather than record what is being discussed. The occasional blank space and a participation grade incentivize them to come to class. Outside of class, students check their understanding using practice exams and an accompanying answer key. Practice exams also serve as the focal point for the evening study sessions I hold before an exam. Some of my best moments as an educator have been at these sessions when a look of realization flashes across the face of a dedicated student no longer struggling with a concept.

Bethany College
Box 103 • Bethany, WV 26032
dyoungberg@bethanywv.edu • (563) 340-3398

The best discussions occur outside of class, when students are free from the stress of grades. Tackling a specific topic together breaks down barriers between faculty and students. I learned a great deal in graduate school when I worked with Prof. Robin Hanson on various research projects and that is an experience I look forward to sharing with my own students.

Economics has an unfavorable reputation in popular discourse: that it is about nothing more than money and financial markets. It is much more than that, of course. I view it as akin to a vocabulary that articulates the hidden order of everyday life, explaining everything from why some countries have trouble developing to why people should walk out of more movies. We learn best when we express an idea in our own words rather than simply hear it told to us. My teaching philosophy involves tapping into that instinct to illustrate economic lessons collaboratively and thus teach students a new language.