

**Robert O. Munk\***  
**Teaching Statement**  
**Ohio State University**

As an undergraduate student, my favorite courses demanded a high level of critical thinking, both in and outside the classroom. I benefited greatly from these courses, which were instrumental in my decision to pursue a Ph.D. in economics. As an instructor, I strive to offer these same learning opportunities to my students. This commitment is a key part of my teaching philosophy: (1) students need to understand key concepts rather than relying on rote memorization, (2) students need to face challenging assignments outside the classroom that encourage independent, critical thinking, and (3) the classroom atmosphere needs to be both demanding and encouraging of open, healthy discussion.

Students often struggle to understand theoretical concepts without real-world examples. Therefore, to assist students, I draw on examples from their everyday lives. For example, when I lead discussions on the returns to education, I ask students why they personally decided to pursue their degrees. Some mention they enrolled to acquire skills, some say they enrolled because a degree is required to get a “good” job, and others mention the non-pecuniary aspects (*e.g.*, a desire to learn, the social atmosphere, *etc.*). This discussion then allows me to clarify the difference between viewing education as an investment and viewing education as a signal of ability to employers.

Assignments that push students to think critically about the topics discussed in class are a necessary component of any course. Even though these assignments are completed outside the classroom, I actively encourage students to consult with me in my office, before or after class, or through email with any questions they may have. For long-term assignments, these consultations take the form of mentorship—an aspect of teaching I enjoy immensely. In a course on current economic issues, I require that students write a research paper on an economic issue of their choice. Throughout the semester, I encourage students to consult with me about any questions or struggles related to this assignment. In addition, I require that students submit two drafts of their paper so I can provide individual feedback. I also ask students to submit these drafts to two classmates, who are also required to offer constructive criticism. These classmate reviews often offer a different perspective on the project, and allow students to hone their critical and evaluative skills.

I encourage active classroom participation by frequently asking questions on important course topics. While fostering discussion is a key component of good teaching, it is a skill I have had to cultivate. Early in my teaching career, I could not “stomach” the silence that would follow a question—particularly early in the semester. Over time, I have learned to give students time to think, and I have learned to re-phrase questions or offer examples to draw them out. I often find that my efforts to encourage participation lead students to ask interesting questions of their own. In my course on current economic issues, these questions often turn into research papers. For example, a discussion on the gains from trade led a student to write a paper analyzing Bangladesh’s garment industry.

My diverse teaching experiences at Ohio State have taught me to be a more effective instructor, and I look forward to the challenge of teaching new courses. I am particularly interested in teaching

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courses on labor economics, the principles of micro- and macroeconomics, and undergraduate level econometrics. In addition, I would welcome the opportunity to develop a course on the economics of entrepreneurship.