

# Teaching Portfolio

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## 1. Teaching Experience

### 1.1 At California State University San Marcos

- **Principles of Microeconomics**  
Spring 2007 (2 sections, 43 and 34 students)
- **Intermediate Microeconomics I** (AKA Consumer Theory)  
Summer 2007 (15 students), Fall 2007 (40 students)
- **Intermediate Microeconomics II** (AKA Producer Theory)  
Fall 2006 (25 students), Fall 2007 (40 students)
- **Game Theory and Decision Analysis**  
Spring 2007 (39 students)
- **Business and Government**  
Fall 2006 (19 students)

### 1.2 At Willamette University

- **Principles of Microeconomics** (appx. 25 students per section)  
Fall 2004, Spring 2005 (2 sections), Fall 2006 (2 sections)
- **Economic Statistics** (appx. 25 students per section)  
Fall 2004 (2 sections), Spring 2005, Fall 2006, Spring 2006
- **Intermediate Microeconomics**  
Spring 2006 (25 students)
- Law and Economics Seminar  
Fall 2005 (12 students)

### 1.3 At University of Washington

- **Industrial Organization** (appx. 25 students each section)  
Spring 2004, Summer 2004, Winter 2005
- **Principles of Microeconomics**  
Spring 2001 (30 students)
- **Intermediate Microeconomics**  
Six semesters/sections from 2001 to 2003 (approx. 30 students each)

### 1.4 At Seattle Central Community College

- **Principles of Microeconomics**  
Summer 2003 (35 students), Fall 2003 (35 students)

### 1.5 Teaching Assistant Experience at University of Washington

Graduate Microeconomics (Economics Ph.D.), Benefit-Cost Analysis (Graduate Public Affairs School), Principles of Microeconomics, Introduction to Economics, Information Economics, Industrial Organization, Game Theory.

## 2. Teaching Philosophy

“[You go to school] for the art of expression, for the art of assuming, at a moment’s notice, a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person’s thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy... Above all, you go to a great school for self-knowledge.”

Michael Oakshott on the reflections of an Eton master (William Cory)  
*Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, p491-92, Liberty Press, 1991

Oakshott articulates a definition of learning that exemplifies my own experience as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts school. Learning, he says, stems not from the mere presentation of facts and results, but is manifest in the accumulation of general knowledge, and in the empowerment to *self-learn* and apply new knowledge beyond the classroom. Whether I am faced with large university classes or with small college classes, I seek to engage students in the material, to contribute to their general knowledge, and to teach them to think critically even after class ends. This is how I define effective teaching, and it is the basis of my teaching philosophy.

Because students all have different styles of acquiring information, I embrace a wide array of strategies to cater to each student’s own learning style. The analytical and philosophical nature of economics lends itself easily to a broad range of approaches to student learning. I evaluate students based on a *broad range of evaluation criteria*. Students are given opportunities outside of exams to demonstrate what they have learned, including participation in discussions, writing, and problem sets. I find that this puts less emphasis on short-term memorization, which often does not remain after the course has ended, and emphasizes long-term achievements which are more likely to stick with a student after the course is completed. The goal of my approach is to infect students with my passion for economics by using my creativity to welcome different learning styles and to inspire students to think critically in both introductory and advanced classes. In order to pursue this philosophy, I draw on a wide array of activities including discussions, writing assignments and essays, group assignments, and interactive experiments. I persistently urge students to reach conclusions on their own, rather than await my answer or response to a problem.

The most successful classes thrive on student interaction. Because I avoid strictly lecturing on the issues, students dynamically provide feedback on the pace of the class through the discussions and writing assignments. This enables me to adapt the speed and content of a class to match with the students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Furthermore, because we've already broken the ice with questions and discussion, students are more likely to speak up when they are lost or don't understand something – something that in my own experience as a student was difficult but very important to overcome. This style has made my classes more enjoyable for the students, but also for me. I feel more connected with the students, which allows me to better express my passion for the subject, and I find that they respond to that with enthusiasm of their own.

Students can expect a wide variety of activities in a class. These activities are primarily to increase engagement and active learning, but also provide a variety of ways for students to show me what they know. In principles classes, I use short reading quizzes regularly to provide added encouragement not only to read the material before class, but also to make sure the reading is being done with enough attention by the students. I use “five-minute writing assignments” (Is a drafted army *more costly* than an enlisted army? Do wealthy meat-eaters of the world cause poor vegetarians to go hungry? Should people be allowed to sell kidneys?), group projects, and problem solving as a means of establishing a classroom community in which students interact not just with me, but with each other as well. For example, when I introduce the concept of opportunity costs to students, I have them break into groups of 3 or 4 and list their own costs of attending college. The group allows them to discover with help from peers how the different economic costs apply to their own experiences.

Classroom experiments and essay assignments also reduce the emphasis of tests, allowing students to address concepts which cannot be asked in an “exam question” format. After class experiments, such as a Double Oral Auction, a Voluntary Public Good Game, and a Repeated Prisoners' Dilemma, students are to write an essay answering some broad questions about the theory and results. Robert Frank's

“economic naturalist” assignment, which has students formulate and solve their own everyday economics question, has also been very effective at fostering discussion in the classes that followed.

In the classroom, it is more important to me to keep students focused on the discussion and less concerned with note taking. To support this, I provide students with detailed notes outlining the material for each class. While some students still choose to take notes as a means of staying alert, I stress that their intention should not be to document everything that is said. I have received very positive feedback on this technique, as it moves the emphasis of class time from recording notes to engagement in discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Many of my students maintain contact with me long after the quarter has ended – I discuss with them what classes to take and give them tutoring with their current classes as sort of an informal advisor-mentor. I am rewarded with the pleasure of knowing that they value my input, and the feeling that I have indeed passed on some spark of interest in the field of economics.

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<sup>1</sup> Providing lecture notes has also reduced comments such as “will this be on the test?”. Part of what causes this question is students are unsure of whether a particular comment should be recorded.

### **3. Assessment**

Assessment has been critical to my growth as a teaching professional. My greatest strengths as a teacher have been my dedication to the individual student and in my attempt to create a truly interactive classroom for the students. Student responses at CSUSM and Willamette have reflected this. Students respond very favorably to classroom experiments and in-class assignments, both of which have become an integral part of all of the classes I teach. I am proud of my most recent assessments but there clearly are areas in which I am working to succeed. Responses to evaluation techniques such as tests and exams were in need of improvement, and I have been paying attention to this closely in my current classes.

Aaron Finkle, Ph.D  
 Teaching Evaluations  
 California State University San Marcos  
 Dept. of Economics

Question*	Summer '07		Spring '07		Fall '06	
	Intermediate Micro I	University Average	Principles of Micro (A)	Principles of Micro (B)	Intermediate Business & Government	University Average
Quality of course	4.85	4.64	4.00	3.30	4.47	4.28
Student learned a great deal	4.69	4.52	3.76	3.35	4.53	4.24
Instructor is an effective teacher	4.92	4.55	3.73	3.57	4.37	4.33
Instructor enthusiastic about teaching	4.85	4.60	4.45	3.88	4.73	4.54
Instructor's interest in student learning	4.85	4.60	4.38	4.06	4.73	4.47
Clarity of course objectives	4.92	4.61	4.00	4.09	4.63	4.40
Effectiveness of assignments	4.69	4.48	4.16	3.30	4.47	4.29
Instructor's response to individual help	4.92	4.62	4.50	4.21	4.75	4.50
Instructor preparedness for class	4.92	4.66	4.55	4.22	4.73	4.53
Instructor's presentations helped learning	4.85	4.57	4.18	3.63	4.63	4.35
Instructor's sensitivity to student difficulties	4.77	4.53	4.32	3.83	4.67	4.32
Instructor receptive to student questions	4.92	4.64	4.37	4.00	4.87	4.51

\*The phrasing of the questions above have been abbreviated for readability. Responses are given on a 1 (strongly disagree/poor) to 5 (strongly agree/excellent) scale.

\*\*Original documents are available if requested (afinkle@csusm.edu).

**Dr. Aaron Finkle**  
 Course Evaluations (Willamette University, Salem Oregon)

Question	Spring 2006		Fall, 2005		Spring, 2005		College Avg.*
	Interm. Micro	Economic Statistics	Law and Economics	Principles of Micro	Principles of Micro	Econ Statistics	
Methods of instruction	2.00	1.89	1.44	2.15	2.37	2.21	1.89
Discussion helped me to learn	2.44	2.71	1.67	2.15	3.00	2.33	1.85
Lectures helped me to learn	1.91	1.94	1.40	2.26	2.30	2.17	1.83
Course materials helped me to learn	1.83	2.00	1.88	1.98	2.44	2.54	1.91
Evaluation instruments	1.65	1.56	1.56	1.93	1.91	1.79	1.68
Responded to questions in class	1.83	1.94	1.56	2.08	1.91	1.96	1.59
Availability outside of class	1.65	1.61	1.50	1.67	1.65	1.48	1.66
Enthusiasm about the subject	1.43	1.50	1.22	1.73	1.64	2.00	1.37
Increased my understanding	1.74	1.61	1.22	1.90	1.82	1.96	1.58
Challenged me to think	1.61	1.72	1.44	1.90	1.87	2.38	1.73
Effectively taught the course	1.91	1.94	1.44	2.07	2.25	2.08	1.69

Score on 1-5 numerical scale where 1 = "Strongly Agree" and 5 = "Strongly Disagree" (i.e. lower is more favorable)

\*College average provided from Spring 2006. Though the college average fluctuates slightly by semester, only a single reporting is provided here to save space.

#### **4. Sample Materials**

I have provided in this packet a sampling of syllabi some of courses I teach. This material is not static and I work to make significant updates each semester in response to evaluations and student performance. Additional syllabi, notes, and exams from most of my classes are also available online at <http://public.csusm.edu/afinkle/Teaching.html>. If you would like to see any material not listed but from classes listed in Section 1 of this portfolio, I am happy to share electronic versions via email ([afinkle@csusm.edu](mailto:afinkle@csusm.edu)).