Teaching portfolio: John Kennes

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is rooted in student centered teaching: students need to know why it is important to learn the source materials for a course, students are responsible for their own learning and need to be given the tools to take on that responsibility, assessment is a key part of the learning process, and an appropriate amount of power must be given to the student.

My decisions about how to teach are informed by my experiences in the classroom and by my engagement with the Centre for Educational Development (CED) (formerly CUL) at Aarhus University which I began through a mentoring relationship with Ole Lauridsen in 2014. The satisfaction that I derive from developing and using my professional skills as a university teacher is now on par with the satisfaction that I derive from being an active researcher who is working at the frontiers of research. My students and colleagues benefit from my engagement in both activities.

I design my courses around five key questions.

1) Goals: What do I want my students to come away with in this class?
2) Logistics: What assessment strategies (formal and informal) will work best with the course content and the nature of the students?
3) Assessment: What assessment strategies will help students meet the desired understandings?
4) Activities: What learning activities will support and engage students in their learning, helping them achieve the course goals?
5) Engagement: What do my students want to achieve / experience taking this course?

I see my teaching as a professional practice that requires continual development through intentional actions on my part. These actions include

1) Personal reflection on teaching experiences
2) Reflecting and acting on feedback from students, teaching assistants and co-teachers
3) Attending courses, workshops and seminars
4) Utilizing research on teaching and learning
5) Engaging in scholarly teaching and learning projects

Teaching practice

DANISH CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS AND MARKETS

Each spring and fall, I am now assigned to co-teach (with Jakob Arnoldi) a class on Danish Culture, Institutions and Markets. This class includes two streams – the A stream (approximately 50 students) where students do 5 ECTS with a single take-home written exam and an A+B stream (approximately 50 students) where students do 10 ECTS with a take-home written exam plus an independent project. This course is design for exchange students at BSS who are studying from abroad (Many students from USA, Canada, UK, Japan, France, Korea, Australia and so on) within many subject areas (Psychology, management, law, economics, anthropology, computer science, and so on). The course is interdisciplinary (Jakob is a sociologist and I am an economist) and focuses on evidence-based discussion of Danish culture, institutions, and markets. The course builds on each student's understanding of another society (their own) to critically analyze Danish Society, which they are experiencing during their study year. My main lecture topics are,

1) Danish families and the welfare state
2) Danish labor markets
3) Danish firms and industries
4) Danish finance
5) Danish markets and the global community

Jakob, for his part, presents a detailed discussion of Danish history, political institutions, governance, education system, happiness, and trust. I include a link to my lecture slides to indicate the diverse material that I cover in this class. A key part of the course is to motivate students to critically evaluate explanations of society that are driven by norms and frames versus explanations of society that are driven by incentive-based motives such as efficiency and competition. The students prepare for their take home exam using questions that Jakob and I develop. For the A+B group, we also supervise the students in the development of independent projects over several weeks. I found that students were approving of my approach.

New! One way that we have decided to prepare students for the exam in 2023 is to also give students the results of chat-GDP answers to questions and to ask students to critically evaluate these AI generated answers considering what they have also been taught in class. Going forward, we welcome the development of AI tools as a means of testing student's critical abilities. This demands that the teacher is also critically minded, which I think comes naturally to researchers actively engaged in social science research. See CV for teaching evaluations.

APPLIED PUBLIC POLICY

I have also been involved in the co-teaching of a course called Applied Public Policy. The goal of this course is to help student acquire knowledge and skills suitable for consulting in relation to the development and evaluation of public policy. The course simulates the entire process of consulting using real cases provide by Ministries, which can feature data sets given to us by the Ministry involved. For example, in our 2021-2022 case, we were able to secure a case from the Ministry of Education that asked students to consult on the problem of student dropouts. As part of the simulation of the consulting process, students are given roles inside a team of four consultants ranging from a team leader to a lead data analyst. Regular meetings between the student teams and the client (We play the role of client) chart the development of consultant ideas. Our feedback helped the students see deficiencies in their approach to these practical problems as well as opportunities that could propel their work forward. This was a very pleasurable process for me personally since I find that it plays to my strengths as an active researcher when a classroom is flipped, and I play the role of a critical consumer of knowledge and the students play the role of knowledge creator. I also found that the students derived satisfaction from my approach to this topic. See CV for teaching evaluations.

Some mechanics of the course are as follows: At the beginning of the semester, students will be divided into teams randomly based on their CVs and a student survey of relevant experience and qualifications. The teams receive an actual or hypothetical consultancy problem forming the basis for the report, which is written over the course of the semester. The teams compete against each other to develop the best consultancy report. The winning team will receive exposure with the actual client and might receive a prize. The course consists of a mix of lectures, guided and unguided project work, role-play with imitation of client relations, etc. The format of the course varies over the semester in order to mimic the true consultancy process. A number of hand-ins with potentially tight deadlines should be expected over the course of the semester. There is **a** 20 min. oral exam based on the project report with no preparation time. The weight of the oral exam is approximately 1/3, and the weight of the project report is approximately 2/3. The specified aid in the oral exam is the student's team driven project report.

MACROECONOMICS

Each fall (Since 2014) I teach a macroeconomics class (45-60 students) in the mathematics department at Aarhus University. The key source material for this course is a textbook by Olivier Blanchard which is updated every two or three years to reflect new developments in macroeconomics events. To help my students understand why this source material is important, my lectures approach this material from several different angles related to discussion of contemporary economic problems and alternative theories and mechanisms. To help students learn the source material – i.e., the material in the textbook **-** I give students weekly assignments where the students present and discussed their answers in weekly tutorials given by teaching assistants who I supervise. The main form of final evaluation is an oral exam where the students draw one of 12 topics (which they prepare in advance) to which the students give a presentation, and this is then followed by some questions that are primarily about the source material for the course. To prepare for the exam, my teaching assistants and I give students feedback on team presentations of one or more topics. Generally, I find that students learn the material. However, some students worry that my own lectures too often veer from the main source material. I do this for the benefit of the student and not my evaluations. One of my goals is to help students think about what are the limitations of the macroeconomic theories that are commonly used by professional economists even though this critical awareness is not the focus of the exam format. This is tempered by the student's strong appreciation of the weekly tutorials that do focus on this source material without prejudice. See CV for teaching evaluations.

OTHER COURSES

In general, I am interested in teaching courses related to Danish public policy in a broad range of areas concerning for instance job satisfaction and stress, youth unemployment, childcare, immigration, retirement, social mobility, education, intergenerational mobility, taxation, environmental sustainability, household finance, and school assignment. Given my broad interests as a researcher I find that I also prefer not to teach narrow tools-based courses such as advanced microeconomics to PhD students, which is what I was teaching when I first started working at Aarhus University. I think it is often seen as an appropriate outcome of comparative advantage that I teach these high-level tools-based courses, but I derive less satisfaction doing so. I also think this sentiment is in line with the developments inside the economics profession of not overwhelming students with theoretical tools-based methods. My own approach to theory has always been to learn what I need to know based on what topics I research rather than look for applications of the tools that I learned in some advanced theory course by some grim economist challenging me to reprove yet another theorem. That said, anyone looking at my research will see the application and development of advanced theoretical tools. Therefore, I have the skills and I am comfortable giving suggestions and feedback on how to apply advanced micro-econometric tools to advanced students outside a structured classroom setting.

SUPERVISION AND MENTORING OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

I am engaged with two types of supervision and mentoring of independent research. The first is mentoring students who are engaged in a bachelor's projects or a master's thesis. The second is the active engagement of academic researchers at the beginning of their career.

Bachelor's projects or a master's thesis: I generally make clear to students that I wish them to pursue a research topic of their own choosing. After students choose these topics. I then ask them to find data that can support the development of their research and their research skills. I think I do a disservice to the student if they are not actively engaged in thinking about what data is needed and how to assessment this data. One strategy that I find myself suggesting time and again is the creation and use of a survey. This plays into my own strength since I have been quite involved in the development of surveys within my last two major DFF grants. See CV for teaching evaluations

Engagement of academic researchers at the beginning of their career: I am involved in research projects with many persons who are either inside a PhD or are within the first two years of their first appointment after a PhD. I think my engagement with these researchers occurs because my areas of research are best approached after students have acquired solid empirical and theoretical skills that are learned during a PhD. I also think that I am working in areas of research that are of profound importance to society. And, I have developed skills and methods that are useful to the advancement of this research. It is a great joy as a researcher to see my skills complement the work of smart and ambitious colleagues at the start of their careers.