

Dr Wong Wei Kang

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Dr Wong Wei Kang brings both rigour and innovation to the teaching of economics. He has found ways to inspire interest in what might otherwise be dusty and dry topics in his introductory macroeconomics module, and he has developed an upper-level module that offers students the chance to explore the boundaries of the field, where cross-fertilization between economics and psychology has been particularly productive.

One of Dr Wong's evident strengths as a teacher has been to increase student interest in the subject by offering clear explanations and constantly relating classroom material to events in the outside world. Students have responded by noting not just how much they have learnt, but how surprisingly enjoyable he made it. To make long-dead economists 'come alive', to use the phrase of one student, in a second year undergraduate module is an impressive feat. One teaching technique that has served Dr Wong well in this regard has been to develop the use of 'story telling' as a classroom method to arouse student interest and provide intuitively understandable applications of the concepts and theories being introduced. He has also made extensive use of news articles covering contemporary economic news, both in lectures and as emailed handouts to students, which connect the potentially dry and abstract content of an economics course to the sometimes dramatic events in the news. Students frequently comment on how much they appreciated these news items as a means of applying concepts, extending their knowledge and developing their capacity to not just solve technical equations but to understand the world around them.

Student engagement and learning have also been facilitated by Dr Wong's use of technology. He has gone beyond using technology as an instrument for disseminating information via IVLE or email, to develop it as a resource for conveying visual representations of concepts, to promote classroom connection in innovative ways (such as the setting up of a facebook group for his class), and to offer students the chance to review lectures using the webcast facility.

Dr Wong's teaching stands out for being able to combine the task of teaching 'content' with teaching analytic skills and critical thinking. The task of teaching a critical awareness of the limits of a discipline and stimulating students to think independently is particularly challenging when teaching modules that require students to come to grips with a considerable amount of content that constitutes the cumulative knowledge base of a discipline. Students must understand a model before they can critique it, and modules such as the undergraduate introduction to macroeconomics taught by Dr Wong must, of necessity, cover an essentially well-trodden path if students are to be equipped to continue in the discipline. It is therefore particularly noteworthy that Dr Wong has taken care to teach the module in such a way that holds the door open for students to develop their own ability for independent thinking. One way this has been achieved is by introducing students to the *debates* within macroeconomics that have unfolded over the decades, pitting contending theorists against each other and thereby calling upon students to see the field as a dynamic one in which the scope for further enquiry remains alive, not a set of static knowledge to be absorbed. As students frequently note in their feedback, Dr Wong has not only explained concepts with clarity, he has pushed them to think.

In advanced modules, Dr Wong has been able to extend requirements for independent thinking and critical enquiry even further than is possible in an introductory module. He has achieved this through a number of classroom techniques and assessment tasks, such as adopting a Socratic style of teaching and by setting assessment tasks such as developing a critique of a published article or requiring students to evaluate, not just show understanding of, different theoretical models. In order to avoid the potential pitfall of allowing the subject to be ruled by its instruments, in this case mathematics, he has defined one of his core teaching rules as being to use maths, but teach economics. This injunction is especially important in view of the criticism academic economics has faced in recent years, of indoctrinating students into a self-referential mathematical world divorced from actual economic problems and empirically-observable behavioural patterns. No such charge could be brought against Dr Wong's teaching. In fact, his Honours module on behavioural economics stands as a showcase for economics teaching that is both foundational, in the sense of critically investigating the core assumptions the discipline, and at the cutting edge of new developments in the field.