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AECN 141- Introduction to the Economics of Agriculture

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AECN 141- Introduction to the Economics of Agriculture



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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Peer Review Portfolio

Three Policy Changes for Retention

Intro/Objectives

The fall of 2006 was my first semester teaching in a college setting. Since this appointment, I have taught economics, management, statistics, and ag economics each semester. Until joining the faculty at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, my load was always 24 credit hours/year. Currently my load is 18 hours/year. I have taught a wide variety of courses ranging the entire curricula. I have taught large (300 students) and small (8 students) courses, as well as everything in between. The main difference in delivery between large and small sections is my ability to individually engage students. The difference between the two is as simple as my ability to learn names of all students in small classes, but not large classes.

Typically, the large enrollment courses have been introductory or principle level courses. It is my opinion these courses are more important for the individual student than higher-level courses. For instance, Principles of Microeconomics is more important than Intermediate Microeconomics or Industrial Organization; without a fundamental understanding of markets (as taught in principles), the learning possibilities in the other two courses are limited. This would be akin to asserting that elementary school is more important towards learning than high school. This makes more sense when you realize that you learn to read in those early years.

Despite this, administrators do not always put the best instructors in these classes. Instead, they are staffed with TAs, new assistant professors, or loosely qualified instructors. Perhaps my attitude is self-fulfilling, but I choose to revel in the appointment of teaching these courses.

This positive attitude is necessary when teaching the subjects I listed. Typical college students do not get excited about quantitative analysis, and economics has a unique challenge all

to itself. After more than ten years teaching principles of economics, I have realized the class “lulls” students into thinking they do not need to study. Compare economics with organic chemistry. Organic chemistry is obviously hard, the verbiage and diagrams are unlike anything students have likely encountered. Economics is the opposite. Most topics have some connection to real life. Therefore, when students hear an example given by the instructor, they believe they too, understand the topic.

Until it hits them, typically during the exam, that there are many moving parts. For some students, it is not even during the exam that they realize they do not fully understand the material; it is when the correct answers are revealed the next class period. Unfortunately, many students regard their poor performance as an anomaly and do not change their methods for the next exam. By the time two poor exam grades are earned, the student’s grade is likely far below their actual capabilities.

In my experience, at Buena Vista University and South Dakota State University, I utilized several informal strategies to combat this problem. One simple method was to remind them repeatedly the material was harder than it appeared. This, along with several other techniques, resulted in positive outcomes.

If asked why I know these outcomes were positive, my evidence is anecdotal only. The students I taught met objectives in 300/400 level courses and typically enjoyed post-collegiate success. In addition, I motivated students to participate in travel opportunities, conferences, and other extracurricular (but academic) ventures. The only hard evidence I had relating to my teaching effectiveness was peer review, student reviews, and winning a teaching award.

When I accepted my Professor of Practice position at UNL I was very nervous. I am not a traditional farmer and I have little research experience. In addition, I was in the final phases of completing my EdD. The only part of the move that I was not concerned about was teaching. It was my “place,” that I always found positive feedback. Quickly I realized my “place” had dynamics that I did not understand.

This only exacerbated my nervousness. Through the hiring process, it was made clear that a secondary component of my position was to excite students about Agricultural Economics. The purpose of exciting them was to gain enrollment in the department. I was told I was the first point of contact in the department and that it was important the students have a positive experience.

After one semester, I communicated with the administration that this was an impossible task. First year students base their enjoyment in a class based on their perceived grade, as well as the opinion of their peers. I felt as though making the class easy to appease the complaints of the minority would go directly against my ethics and moral code. As a lifelong educator, I feel it is important to give students what they need and not what they want.

Unfortunately, the student complaints persisted. What was surprising was the manner in which students were complaining. A number of them (not revealed to me) went to the department head and academic advisor to complain. These students never went to me, instead their complaints were taken as gospel truth. It was relayed to me that they felt I “question shamed” them, and wrote only trick questions on exams. I vehemently denied this as I encourage students to ask ANY question, even if it is simply exclaiming, “I don’t get it.” If they are uncomfortable speaking in large groups, I encourage them to email questions. I even give

them weekly opportunities to write questions down on paper and pass them forward anonymously. This process made me very defensive and fearful for my job security.

I felt as though students were achieving in a similar manner as they had in my previous classes. Nonetheless, the complaints were heeded and I was again advised to make changes to curtail such issues.

The first three semesters of teaching at UNL were the hardest three semesters of my life. Clearly, the qualitative feedback of students, especially negative feedback, is carefully monitored. I do believe that retention is an important aspect of my job. Therefore I was motivated to join the peer review project as an attempt to continue to teach the learning objectives I (and my colleagues) feel is needed in the course, but not lose Ag Econ/Ag Business to other departments.

Formal Peer Review Objectives

I have two categories of objectives for my participation in the peer review program. The first was outlined previously; to engage students in a way that excites them about Agricultural Economics. This is a broad, strategic objective. The second set of objectives are as follows:

- Separating ACE 6 objectives from the applied nature of AgEcon
- Strengthening quantitative analysis to students fearful of math/graphs
- Communicate the rigor of the course early.

Although these objectives are more specific than the first; they too lead to meeting the first objective. That is, if students are not “put off” by the social science aspect (ACE 6) of the class, quantitative analysis, or rigorous content, they are more likely to persist within the department.

Description of the Course

The catalog description of the course, “Introductory course on the basic principles of agricultural economics. Production economics, principles of supply and demand, resource economics, world food situation, marketing of agricultural products, and agricultural public policy.”

It is close, but not exactly what the actual content of the course is. Previously the course was taught by the same Professor for over 25 years. During this time, the department’s curriculum and faculty had been significantly overhauled. The main change in the department was from an applied Agribusiness curriculum to a more flexible Agricultural Economics curriculum. This change is reflective of the change in personnel, and research. In my opinion, this change is overwhelmingly positive.

The curricular changes I influenced were the use of a textbook, titled, “Introduction to Agricultural Economics”, and a heavy focus on the theoretical underpinnings of Economics. This was in response to my communication with my colleagues in the department. Students are struggling in Econ 312, for which this is a prerequisite, hence the focus on the Economic portion of the class. This change was corroborated by the classification as an ACE 6 course, one that analyses a Social Science.

My original intent was to use a traditional microeconomics textbook. However, the department chair indicated his desire for the class to be differentiated from Econ 212 (the equivalent course in the College of Business). I did not feel this was an issue. The main way AECN 141 would be differentiated from Econ 212 would be contextual. Learning about

consumer and producer theory through the lens of food and agriculture would be the fundamental difference between the two courses.

One consequence of using an Agricultural Economics textbook was the lack of online homework. For the past 5+ years I have relied on Myeconlab and Aplia to provide outside support for students in large section classes. These platforms are well developed for economics and many other disciplines, unfortunately, Ag Econ is not one of them. Even though I had not been without online support for many years, I was not concerned.

AECN 141 Course Goals

The goals for this course are for students to understand and display knowledge of the following:

-Producer/Consumer Theory

-Agricultural Markets

-Resource Markets

-Ag trade/policy

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. **apply** market analysis (supply and demand) to various commodity market scenarios
2. **explain** Ag production and consumption by using economic theory for support.
3. **Discuss** the impact of regional, national, and global agribusiness policy

The Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes listed above are a more accurate reflection of what is taught in the course, and are stated explicitly in the syllabus. Producer

theory could be explained as, ‘how/why firms behave as they do,’ and consumer theory could be explained as, ‘how/why consumers behave as they do.’ Markets are the meeting of buyers and sellers, a trade policy is just that. These goals and learning outcomes are framed in agriculture. Usually the examples are Nebraska ag specific, but not always.

Assessment Activities

For the first semester I taught at UNL the only assessment tool utilized were exams. In this semester, there were four exams, each worth 25% of the overall score. The reason I only used exams this first semester was pragmatic; I had no TAs, and expected there would be online content available in the book. This was not the case.

The second and third semesters I taught the course, I introduced ‘quiz’ activities that would account for 20% of the student’s overall grade. (Four exams worth 20% each and 12-15 quiz activities worth 20%). In addition to these quiz activities I assigned problems from the book for which I believed the content to be valuable. These assignments were not graded.

For the most part, the quiz activities were participation based. I encouraged students to ask questions, even if the questions were, ‘how would you ask this on an exam?’ In which case I would write an exam question pertaining to the topic on the spot.

While there may have been some positive outcome from adding these quiz activities, they complicated the gradebook and created another source of angst for students. I received more questions pertaining to how a weighted grade was calculated than questions regarding class content. I believe a large part of the frustration and lack of results was the stubborn belief (on

the student's side) that I would succumb to the pressure of East Campus fraternities and teach the class as it had been before.

Teaching Activities/Classroom decorum

Each section of AECN 141 is between 70 and 180 students. In the Fall semester I have two sections of the course. Therefore, I run each course the same way. This usually means the smaller section sees the same pedagogical practices as the larger course. The main delivery style of the course would be lecture, although the deficiencies of this practice lead me to utilize several other teaching methods.

To begin each class period I either provide a list of learning objectives on the board, or a brief outline of the day's material. In the third semester teaching the course, I provided an outline most days. These outlines are NOT designed to be lecture notes. Instead, they provide a 3-4 learning outcomes that provide support for one "big idea" for which the lecture is focused. I envision each lecture could have a title a la 1980s television shows.

These 3-4 points are sometimes divided into 3-4 mini-lectures that all tie together. Other times they serve as breaks between learning styles. For instance the day I introduce the Law of Demand, I lecture for approximately ten minutes. During this time I state, rephrase, and explain the "law of demand." Finally, I express several personal experiences that illustrate the law of demand. Following this break, I have students divide into groups of 3 to express their own experiences that illustrate the law of demand. It is my goal to never lecture for the entire class period. In fact, I try to limit the amount of time I'm lecturing to half of the allotted course time.

The activities are not limited to coming up with examples to fit theory. Other example of student engagement would be role playing, answering/discussing open-ended questions, or solving quantitative problems in groups. In the past, students have participated in these type of activities without needing to be rewarded with participation points.

This has not been the case at UNL. Shortly after giving students a task, question to ponder, or scenario to consider, I roam the classroom listening to the conversations. In more cases than not, the students are either a: not talking at all or b: talking about something completely unrelated to class. When I question why the students are not doing what I asked, the typical response is, “we don’t know how,” or a simple shrug of the shoulders.

After some prodding, brave students tell me it is simply easier to wait for me to reveal the solution than to actually go through mental pain of problem solving themselves.

Other Demographic Information

The measureable results of the first three semesters of teaching AECN 141 at UNL (both quantitative and qualitative) were bad enough that they made me question my decision to leave South Dakota State University. Truthfully, these classes were the low point of my teaching career. If it were not for the results of one group of students in the course, my career path may be different. The group of students giving me encouragement to tough out the position were the African students that are part of the CUSP scholars program.

The CUSP scholars are high achieving Rwandan students who are interested in Agriculture. They are expected to return to Rwanda after graduation and work in the field for 5 years. It is also expected they will make a difference immediately. 20-30 of these students have

shown up in class each semester, and no matter the teaching methods I use, they outperform traditional Nebraska students by a large amount.

In a time of cynicism, I could rationalize their superior performance to their above average intellect, or their stellar attendance. The cause/effect relationship between student attributes, teaching methods and outcomes are too confounding for me as a social scientist to comment. Nonetheless, I know Economics is a difficult field for even the brightest students to master. As an above average undergraduate student myself, I know introductory economics were two of my more difficult courses.

The only correlation for which I'm certain exists is between attendance and performance. To this end, I enacted three policy changes to my spring section of AECN 141 to improve overall learning outcomes. I was hopeful these changes would lead to higher grades, and ultimately better retention within the department.

Policy Change #1

The first change I made to the course would not have been specific to Nebraska students. Instead, it was a change I have been thinking about making for some time. That change was providing students with a daily "outline" of class. For years, students have asked for this; given the nature of peer review, I felt this year was an appropriate time to make the change.

One factor necessitating this change was the technology available in the room AECN 141 was held. There is a small board behind the podium, and another small portable board in front of the podium. Given the large size of the classroom, neither of these are adequate when it comes

to graphing economic concepts. The largest screen in the room is the projector screen. This is the screen where I displayed the outline (in Word format to begin the course.)

Later on, I realized I could display my notes over this much larger screen using the digital overhead projector. Then, I could use blank computer paper to draw graphs that were displayed in a size that all students in the room could see. This secondary effect of the policy change may have been the most positive. Even when I presented notes in a hand-written style, I added them to a running word document of each day's outline, as seen below.

Throughout the term, I changed the amount of information I would present in the outline. At the beginning of term, I would provide a more thorough outline. The outline presented below is from the third day of class.

AECN 141 Day Three

- Review 1-10, math appendix
 - Positive vs. Normative Analysis
 - Provide an example of each in your notes
 - Note on economic systems
- Chapter 2
 - Indices
 - CPI: <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/consumer-price-index-and-annual-percent-changes-from-1913-to-2008/>
 - Used to adjust for inflation
 - Calculation
 1. Ratio method

2. Percent method

- Problem #1
 - In 1996 unskilled labor positions (think fast food) paid \$5.15. Today, those same positions pay \$10/hour. Which worker has the highest “real” wage? **Provide proof**
 - Problem #2
 1. In 1979 a Fully Loaded Ford F-250 Supercab had an MSRP of \$8700. If the price of a fully loaded F250 rose at the rate of inflation only, how much would it cost in 2017?
 2. Comment on your answer above. Was the 1979 truck a “bargain” or has something changed?
 - Problem #3
 1. Calculate the overall increase in prices if over the next 10 years inflation is:
 - 1% _____
 - 3% _____
 - 5% _____
 - 7% _____
 - 10% _____

If a student were to simply add their calculations to the in class problems presented, their notes, and classroom participation would be adequate. Near the end of the course, my course outlines became briefer. I did not do this without telling students. Instead, I made the change

explicitly clear; telling them that note taking was a learned skill and that I was taking the training wheels off. Below is an example from later in the term.

AECN 141 4-20 Notes

- Go over Wednesday activity
- Financial Feasibility=Does it Cash Flow?
- Choosing a Discount rate (interest rate)
- NPV and IRR
- What is the Present value at a discount rate of 5%? 10%? 15% (Excel)

Policy Change #2

The second policy change I made was to prohibit personal technology from the classroom. This was a very hard decision to make. One of the tenants of microeconomics is that people are rational actors. Note, this does not mean they do not make mistakes. Instead, it means they process all available information in a way that results in the best-perceived outcomes. I present a discussion on technology use and talk to them about my own technology use. Namely, that I leave my Iphone and computer in my office during staff meetings; because if I do not, I will get distracted and not pay attention.

Despite my best efforts, I have observed students at Nebraska more engaged in their personal devices than I have ever seen. This was not an observation at the end of the class either; it was apparent during the first week.

To display solidarity with the students I vowed to give up my smartphone completely. I told them that if they were asked to do something they did not like for 3 hours per week, I could do it permanently. The second week of class I brought the phone pictured below. To prove it was real (a student claimed I had simply brought an old phone), I had my wife call me the second class period. They were shocked!



Policy Change #3

The final policy change I enacted in class was specific to teaching at UNL. As described above, I had no convenient way to assign graded homework. Instead, I offered a quiz each Friday, and extra credit “pop” quizzes on Mondays and Wednesdays.

In addition to regularly scheduled quizzes and unannounced extra credit quizzes, I posted answer keys to assigned homework. An example quiz is presented below.

Quiz:

1. Think of 2 applied examples where present value analysis would help a farm/ranch manager make a decision. Be specific for full points (2)

2. For each of the scenarios listed above, choose an appropriate discount rate, and explain the difference. (2)

3. If you expect an acre of land to return a profit of \$200 per acre, and have a required return (discount rate) of 5%, what is the most you would pay for the land, assuming the land will return profit indefinitely?(2)

4. If farmland is worth \$4,000 per acre currently, how much will it be worth in 20 years if it increases in value at an annual rate of 5%? 10%? (2)

5. In 1962 corn prices were approximately \$1.25/bushel. How does this compare to current prices? Use your understanding of compounding for full credit (2)

Analysis of data

I give different exams each semester. Also, given the incredible number of factors influencing student performance, I have limited the amount of quantitative analysis. The first data presented is qualitative. Question #36 on the year end evaluation is, “What is your evaluation of this course based upon: (a) your satisfaction with what you got out of this course and (b) whether it was a valuable educational experience or disappointment? Please comment.

The participation in year-end evaluations is not mandatory, and no extra credit is ever given. The response rates vary greatly. Therefore, I will present and evaluate each section of 141 taught for the 3 semesters prior to the course changes presented above.

For each section a fraction appears. This fraction indicates the number of “at risk” students and the total number of respondents. A student was coded “at risk” if they provided an overtly negative response to the survey question. “I was very disappointed” was an often-repeated phrase that triggered an “at risk” label. “At risk” refers to the likelihood the student will not continue in the department, or will behave in a way that hinders future enrollment. Given my brief time teaching at UNL, this is the best proxy for retention.

Fall 2016, Section 1 (5/21)

- I believe that I learned some key items in this course for economics
- **I was very disappointed and didn't much out of this class**
- I liked the course but I think there's a better way to teach it.
- I am satisfied with this course and I feel I learned the basics.
- Very satisfied and thought it was a good experience and makes me think that I made a good choice choosing my degree
- **I am disappointed with the class because I feel that, as a whole students feel that the class was not taught the best way and that they did not get the most they could have out of the course.**
- This course was very valuable educational experience even though I will most likely pass this class with a C.
- Somewhat satisfied with the course because I learned a lot but not much related to agriculture.
- I think this course had a lot of good information. Based on my little background of economics it was a very challenging course for me.
- Very good course to take
- I wish I would've done better in this course and it was a valuable educational experience.
- I am very satisfied with this course and found it to be a very relevant and valuable experience.
- Somewhat satisfied with this course and found it to be very relevant and valuable experience.
- Somewhat satisfied. Valuable to education.

- I feel that I got a decent understanding of basic concepts, and hope to deepen the understanding of them in future courses.
- Liked the course a lot, professor Meyer is very smart. I would ask him to change the nature of the questions sometimes, or at least give us examples of questions on the test to allow us to prepare and study more effectively.
- I feel like all the information that I learned in the course was valuable, not so much for my area of study but just as a human being. It definitely gave me a better understanding of economics as a whole, and made me feel not as lost when I hear politicians discussing money.
- **I was disappointed with this class. I had struggled with economics in previous classes and was hopeful. I felt the professor did not motivate his students or provide materials helpful for success in the course.**
- **I wasn't very happy with this course, and I was extremely excited coming into it.**
- **I wish I would've learned more about economics specifically related to agriculture.**
- It was a valuable educational experience

Fall 2016, Section 2 (18/45)

- I feel the content was very interesting
- **A. satisfaction was low. B. it wasn't very valuable**
- **Very tough to understand**
- **A)not satisfied with this course because it didn't retain anything I learned and didn't fully understand what I learned to apply it. B) It was not valuable and a slight disappointment.**
- I am very satisfied with this course. It was a valuable educational experience and I have taken a lot out of the course
- I learned a lot in this course, however the way he sets up his test sets you up for failure, not success. He needs to re-evaluate how he goes about his test and needs to rewrite them with less opinionated questions.
- At first I was really excited about the class but we went through material so quickly I got lost really fast to the point I didn't even know what questions to ask during class because I was so lost and far behind. Kind of disappointing but I now he has good intentions and is personable but the learning aspect was lacking. I know last year all of the material they learned in the whole semester we covered by the first test. Has been my toughest class this semester.
- **I was really looking forward to this class because it is stuff that I am interested in and I believe it is valuable information. But it was my least favorite class and I didn't like the way it was taught and I am definitely not happy with my grade.**
- **Wasn't satisfied with this course overall, and I don't feel like it was worth my time.**
- I was satisfied with the course, it provided me with valuable knowledge.
- A.)the class was good but hard to understand. B.)Educational experience but had a little disappointment due to the fact that learning the material was difficult for exams.
- A)Good B)Mixed

- This course was extremely interesting and I learned a lot that will help me in the future
- I got some things out of the course. I wish I would have gotten a better understanding of things.
- It was worth while to go to and I liked to listen to stories about government and how banks work.
- **This course was a disappointment and nothing but confusing.**
- **I did learn more about the markets and how supply effects demand but to understand the topic of other terms is hard. I am disappointed in this class because I like econ and this class made me hate it because I did not understand it.**
- **I didn't obtain much from the course. I wish we had more interactive activities; online quizzes to interact with the material.**
- **A) I didn't like this course. I thought it was too hard for a class many students in the past described as a "fun" and "not too difficult" course.**
- I think I got some material out of the class, it was just very intensely taught, so it takes some times to absorb it all. I think it was valuable overall. I really like Tim as a guy and he can be funny and nice, but his course is just difficult. Even though my grade was really bad, I think it was worth taking.
- **I wish I would have learned a lot more in this course than I really have. While I have learned some concepts, I feel as if I barely have been taught them, and as if the course was lacking the depth in learning it should have.**
- A-I feel like I got a lot out of this class. I did not do as well as I would have liked to, but I think that really came down to test scores and my own study habits—not the way it was taught. B-This was a valuable experience. It was a good way to run into multiple agricultural economics concepts.
- I learned some new things, some content was hard to learn.
- The information learned was very beneficial, and I now think differently. It was very valuable information to learn.
- Valuable experience but not very intriguing
- I was a little disappointed in the class
- **I was disappointed about the amount of things I learned from this course and was able to understand. I was hoping to gain more from the course.**
- For both A and B I learned a lot
- A) It was an alright course. B. Kind of a disappointment
- I am satisfied with how this class went and I thought it was valuable
- It was a valuable education experience, I am a newbie to both econ and ag and I think he taught the two together in a way that I could understand. Overall I am satisfied
- I think it was a valuable educational experience because as a freshman I had to learn how to handle a class that I was not familiar with and how to respond to difficulty
- **I wish I got more out of this course, but sadly I did not.**
- It was good
- **I'm disappointed I had to take this course for my major. I don't think it's relevant to what's going on, eve if there is some applications. Most of the big world stuff I already knew.**
- **A)not satisfied, because I never have a problem with learning the martial in class, if it is taught well. I had to drop the class. B)disappointment**

- None
- I was satisfied with this course
- I'm happy with the course and I think it was a good educational experience.
- **Very unsatisfied. I will end up with a decent grade (A or B) but I don't feel I gained much knowledge. This concerns me because this should have been a class that gave me a good knowledge base for the rest of my econ courses.**
- **The satisfaction of this course lacked in my eyes. I have grown up on a farm and I like learning about economics/marketing/commodities, etc....This course made me confused and not really understand these aspects.**
- **It was kind of a disappointing experience.**
- **I feel like this course was a waste of time due to I learned nothing and have the possibility of failing this course.**
- It was interesting
- My evaluation is based on my satisfaction in the class because it is required for my major

Spring 2017, Section 1 (28/66)

- **Dissatisfied overall for this course. I did not like the course content at all, maybe someone who is actually interested in it, would be okay with this course, but I struggled and did not like it all. Was not valuable to me.**
- A) I definitely will be walking out of the class more knowledgeable than when I walked into it at the beginning of the semester. B) I would say this was valuable nor disappointing. I would say it was pretty moderate.
- **It was a very invaluable experience. I do not think I learned anything in this course.**
- It was kind a disappointment
- I am very unsatisfied
- A
- I was not super satisfied with this course, but I did learn a few things.
- I am satisfied with what I got out of this course and I think it was a valuable education experience because it taught me how important going to class is.
- The subject is very interesting but the test were beyond difficult.
- Both A and B.
- I just wish it was more relevant to agriculture topics.
- **Disappointment wish it was taught better so I would've got more out of it**
- **I did not receive a grade I would have liked and over all the learning experience was just a let down.**
- I could have lived my life without this class for sure.
- I think it was a worthwhile class and I think it will definitely help me think about things in the future
- **Dissatisfactory.**
- **Completely dissatisfied and feel I wasted the time and money taking this required class and I'm pissed.**
- **I would not take this course if it was not required. It does not have anything to do with my major**
- **This course wasn't very good and I learned very little.**

- I was not satisfied with it, I merely tried to memorize to get through the class with a B and be done with it.
- I think the course was difficult but not too hard. But again comes down to whether or not your life is based around agriculture
- n/a
- I was satisfied with my knowledge of the agricultural market and basic macroeconomics. B)This course was extremely educational and I never felt lost during Mr. Meyers lectures.
- Overall everything was good.
- **I wasn't satisfied with this course**
- **I was not very satisfied because I was very often confused but I like how he always encouraged questions. Overall I think that it was an educational disappointment.**
- **I would rather not taken it. I don't think I will recommend it to anyone and I will probably have negative things to say if asked.**
- I think it would have been better if I would have known what to expect on the exams. I find the course topic interesting he just made it confusing.
- I was satisfied and happy to learn things especially about hedging and contracts
- **A) I wanted to gain more knowledge about ag econ by taking this course but I could have bought the book and learned way more.**
- I am happy to have learned something about economics even though I was determined not to care. It wasn't a disappointment, I learned something even though I didn't want to.
- I feel fine with what I got out of this course
- **The course had a lot of information, but it was too difficult to follow it all and I didn't get much out of it because of no visuals and too much info at once.**
- This course was satisfactory. A lot of the concepts are general and can be applied.
- **This class has valuable information but I struggled with how the class was taught. I didn't get as much out of the class as I would have liked just because the instructors teaching method did not work for me.**
- **Both, I have gotten really good grades thus far, and this intro to Econ class will be my lowest grade thus far. I love to learn and if I really didn't learn that much from this course how can that help me as I move forward into more complicated classes with Econ.**
- I am satisfied with what I got out of the course
- I am satisfied because it pushed me to study and learn more.
- I had medical and personal things that I had to deal with so learning for me and being mentally present in class was a struggle however the professor was incredibly helpful and understanding
- It was valuable
- **Very little satisfaction, and my grade represents that. Was not a valuable educational experience and it was a disappointment. Students should not do so horrible in the class that is a freshman level class. I have not heard many good things about this course at all.**
- I based it on whether it was a valuable educational experience
- This class was valuable as it prepared me to high level economic courses
- I was good toward my education but was a little hard to understand at times

- **Hated the course**
- Great course but not much was learned
- I learned a little from the class
- It was a valuable educational experience for sure
- Overall I was satisfied with the course and I think it will be beneficial to other courses I have to take in the future.
- **IT was disappointing because I wanted to learn more about ag econ but it was hard to want to learn when all I'm concerned about is my grade.**
- **I was not very satisfied with this course. I did not get much out of this class.**
- **Disappointed, and I hope I take away more in farm and ranch management that I have to take with him next semester.**
- Was a valuable educational experience, but tough
- **I didn't get much out of this course even though I took notes every day and participated in class and used the book. It might have been valuable if it was taught differently, but in this case it was a disappointment. I liked the teacher as a person but not as a teacher. He was not very good at explaining how things worked and why. There were times he wouldn't give enough detail and times he gave too much to where I didn't know what he was talking about anymore.**
- A) I learned a lot, but I feel like there are some things that I didn't completely grasp. My satisfaction is at a par level. B) It had some value, but could be thoroughly improved with the methods I listed above
- It was based on what I gained from the class and saw could be changed.
- I feel that I benefitted from this course and learned what I needed to from it.
- **As a student highly invested in each course I take, I was extremely disappointed in this course. I hoped to gain an understanding of economics applied to agriculture as the course title implies. I, Instead, got very little out of this course, and to be honest, am quite angry about it.**
- **This was a combination of both. I did not get as much out this course as I had hoped. Prior to this course I was hoping that I would be considering a business minor afterwards. Now I am not sure if I will be able to understand what is going on in Macroeconomics course that I will be taking next semester. This is the first time that I have had this feeling at UNL. I was disappointed in this course and I wish I had taken a different option instead.**
- **I don't think this was a very valuable class, it just turned basic concepts and made them more complicated than they need to be.**
- **I learned nothing it was a waste of time.**
- **I did not enjoy this course.**
- I enjoyed the course and learned a lot.
- **I got nothing out of the course other than being able to memorize some information to pass the test. This is an absolute waste of money to take this class taught by a professor that doesn't teach well at all.**
- **I learned a lot but I think I will be disappointed with my final grade considering the time and effort I put into the class.**
- Education

Fall 2017, Section 1 (6/13)

- **I was not satisfied with the material because it was hard to understand in general**
- **It was a disappointment because I felt like it was a waste of money**
- **The class was too hard, I was very disappointed in how the instructor taught the class**
- **I am horrified with my performance in this course and I do not see it as a valuable investment. It was a waste of my time and money and this class wrecked my GPA.**
- **Based on my grade I'm not completely satisfied with what I got out of this course. I am disappointed. A lot of the disappointment comes from the fact that I actually did try hard to get a good grade. This course has been the toughest class I have taken as a college student. Before coming in this class I've maintained a really good GPA and unfortunately, this course will bring it down.**
- I got some useful information out of this course. It was extremely stressful
- We covered futures markets and investments for one day. I would like to spend more time on understanding how that works in relation to the beef market.
- I got little satisfaction out of the course. I think the content is valuable but the class as a whole was very frustrating.
- My evaluation is based on both my satisfaction in this course and also if it was a valuable experience.
- **I am quite unsatisfied with what I learned in the course and was disappointed that I wasn't able to learn/understand more.**
- I got a lot out of this course but it didn't really challenge me. It was a valuable experience
- Satisfied with what I got out of the course but it was difficult sometimes, also valuable experience where I learned new information.
- It was valuable

Fall 2017, Section 2 (8/22)

- I did not necessarily like this course. It was fine but not my favorite. Kind of a disappointment. Perhaps with a different professor it would have been better.
- I got a lot of good real world information, and overall I'm mostly happy.
- Whether this class was a valuable experience
- The class average, correlation of test, hours studied, and explanation of material
- **Did not like**
- I think I have learned how to be preserving and determination in this course so that I can get the grade that I want. I think it was valuable in that respect.
- **I only got a few valuable information pieces from this class, which is not what I was expecting to gain. It was a little disappointing, as the material wasn't presented the way I was hoping it would be.**
- **I didn't really find it valuable. This course just became a "Just make it through the end" course. It was a disappointment.**
- It was a valuable duration experience for me, I have learned that I should prepare myself well before tests and be more cautious. I gained knowledge and skills about economics,

my thinking about economical items is no longer the same, and I was satisfied no matter the final grade I get

- **I think the teaching style and way the class was set up (no assignments) didn't allow me as much as it should have. That is disappointing because I need this knowledge for my career.**
- I am disappointed in my success in this course, however it was partially on me and partially on how difficult the test were.
- I liked this course a lot and feel that I learned a lot. It was a very valuable educational experience for me.
- I was very satisfied with this course because it was one of those classes that made me work harder to get a good grade. I am a "nerd" so I like the classes that push me more. This class did that and I appreciate that. I probably bugged the heck out of Dr. Meyer, but at least I was showing motivation towards learning. I think this was a valuable education experience and was disappointed in other students for not seeing that. Other students only wanted an easy class that they could skate by through and this was not one of those classes.
- I feel like I got a lot out of this course. It showed me the basics of economics and I learned a bunch.
- **I am not satisfied with this course, and I would consider it an educational disappointment. I paid attention in class every day and missed only two class meetings, I studied with other students, took notes, and studied for exams but the material was just not taught very well.**
- I'm not quite sure how this course applies to my major or area of study, so I wasn't sure what I supposed to get out of the course. I do think some of it was valuable though.
- **Disappointment**
- I am very satisfied with this course and feel it was very valuable education experience which will help me in the future.
- **This was based on how unsatisfied I was with this course**
- It was okay! I enjoyed it during class
- I did not like this course or the way it was taught
- **I am disappointed in the overall educational experience of this course. I did not feel that I learned a lot from this course. In the beginning of the semester I was looking forward to this class but at the end I was uninterested in this course and was just hoping to pass the class**

Spring 2018, Section 1 (6/28)

- I am pleased to have taken the course but it is not one that I can see myself using a lot in the future but it is nice to know for life in general.
- I think that this is an excellent course, even though it can be difficult at times. The information was taught well enough to get some information but could have learned more
- Educational
- **I am not sure that I actually got anything beneficial out of this class that I will use in the future. I think if it was taught in a different way or by a different instructor I**

would have gotten more information out of the course, I think if there was some changes made it would be more valuable for the students taking the course.

- Overall satisfied with the course as I got some information out of it. Thought the class was taught well enough to get to get some information.
- I am satisfied and think this course was worthwhile.
- **A)Very dissatisfied as I feel if I was taught in a different way, it would definitely make more sense and I would be able to get an A. B)It was a disappointment, and I feel like I learned nothing compared to other classes I'm in. I can just tell you that this class has been a blur because the understanding for this material is not there.**
- I have a hard time keeping my attention in this class...but overall it was good
- I thought this class was valuable in the sense that it exposed me to some economic ideas I was previously unaware of. Overall I am disappointed with my performance in this class.
- I feel like I learned a lot but also got confused by a lot. Overall will be able to apply this information to my career in the future.
- I think that this course was not bad it was a completely new topic to me so I did not know what to expect. It has been interesting to learn about Ag Econ and all of the things involved with it. It is a very in depth subject.
- I am not very satisfied with the outcome of this course, but I do believe it is a valuable educational experience.
- Overall I will say I learned economics and feel comfortable answering basic questions about it, but grade wise, it does not reflect everything that I now so that is somewhat frustrating.
- It was fairly taught
- I really didn't get anything Ag related out of this class which I am very disappointed in. It was valuable but it would've been more valuable if we talked more about AG
- It was ok
- I feel that I got some good information out of this course but could have gotten more out of it if it had been taught using another method. I understand some of these concepts are most easily taught through graphs but they are fairly hard for many students to understand and learn from .
- I did learn something in this class but I would have liked to learn more but it was pretty difficult
- **A. I felt I could've learned more had I taken Micro rather than Ag Econ b. It was valuable because I got my first experience with a difficult course**
- My evaluation has been based on both of the criteria.
- I liked this course for real
- I was valuable and the materials were somehow understandable
- It was a valuable educational experience and I know that I got something out of it that I will apply to my future profession, which is more than I can say for a lot of courses.
- **I am extremely disappointed in my grade in this class. I studied, read, came to class, and took notes, as well as saw the instructor during office hours and I still was getting Cs on the exams. I would not recommend this class to anyone. If anything I would suggest to take the one on city campus. I've heard it's easier.**
- I was satisfied with the course and the subject was interesting.

- I am not entirely satisfied with what I got out of this course and I felt that very well could have been a education experience had Dr. Meyer done some things differently. I will say that I am more knowledgeable about agriculture economics than I was before I enrolled in this course.
- **Although this course was hard and I have my negative comments about it, I believe when taught completely right it could benefit a lot of people that are going into this field.**
- **I wish I could have been able to comprehend the material better even though I always came to class and read the book. I felt prepared for exams but still didn't do as well as I felt I should've based on my comprehension of the material I was learning.**

Overall analysis

One trend that did not change from Fall of 2016 to Spring of 2018 was the nature of student discontent. Below is a list of often repeated rationale for their dissatisfaction

- The class is too hard
- The class would be better if taught in a different way
- The class is too focused on agriculture
- The class is not focused enough on agriculture
- The grade received is not representative of student effort
- It is their least favorite class

I do not believe the nature of these complaints will ever change. One trend in positive results was that students felt they had learned how to persevere in a tough class, and they learned how important attendance was. Whether Economics is taught in a classical liberal arts tradition, or applied as it is in AECN 141, the fundamental topics are difficult, even seemingly contradictory to first time students.

This does not mean I am not taking responsibility for negative outcomes. THIS

The other trend I noted could be best summed up by a comment from a student in the Fall of 2017

I was very satisfied with this course because it was one of those classes that made me work harder to get a good grade. I am a “nerd” so I like the classes that push me more. This class did that and I appreciate that. I probably bugged the heck out of Dr. Meyer, but at least I was showing motivation towards learning. I think this was a valuable education experience and was disappointed in other students for not seeing that. Other students only wanted an easy class that they could skate by through and this was not one of those classes.

Earlier in my portfolio, I stated that it was the instructor’s job to give students what they need, and not what they want. Given the influence students have on the evaluation of my teaching performance by non-faculty members in my department, this is a huge concern. These informal power centers are traditional change agents in the department and drive the undergraduate program. This weighs heavily on me; the student comment above reifies my belief that most of the negativity from students is a symptom of immaturity, or simply being held accountable for the first time. This is not a criticism of UNL students; it is a part of college most (me for sure) of us have to endure.

My colleagues are overwhelmingly supportive of the changes and direction I am making in the classroom. However, they also understand enrollment is important to the continued existence of the department.

Fortunately, I believe the changes I implemented in the Spring of 2018 were influential in changing the opinion of students. For the previous three semesters, the percentage of at risk students was 39% (65/167), and would have been higher if it were not for one early class that had few at risk respondents (5/21). After the changes were implemented, the at risk rate fell to

21%. Given the nature of time series data and the low sample size, this evidence is little more than anecdotal. However, it is anecdotal in the right direction. I plan on more changes to take advantage of this momentum.

Future Changes

For Fall 2018 I have acquired funding for the use of graduate TA. Unlike the past instructor who employed a small army of undergraduate TAs, I do not feel it is appropriate for undergrads to grade student work. As a Professor of Practice, I am where the buck stops and take responsibility for almost all teaching activities. However, a graduate student is different. With this extra set of hands I plan on assigning homework “packets” that will be due prior to each exam. These packets will be graded for completion and accuracy.

While not a change, I plan to continue to utilize the changes outlined for this project. Students have asked repeatedly for a “study guide” and the lecture notes I provide do just that; so long as they attend class. They also complain the exams are unlike questions in the book; extra credit quizzes are exactly the same. Finally, the distraction of smartphones is overwhelming. When that is combined with the somewhat dry content taught in class, it is a recipe for disengagement. While I would like students to choose to avoid smartphone distractions, what they need is a policy.

Final Thoughts

I have been a ball of stress every day since I arrived at UNL. The experiences I have communicated in this portfolio are only part of the reason. For some time this year, participating in the program only lead to more stress. I was worried I did not have anything to write/report. I

was worried about getting the assignments read, and finally, I was worried my final project would not be good enough.

I do not know if it is good enough, and frankly I am no longer concerned. The activities we engaged in during our meeting times and the readings assigned were valuable without any monetary compensation. It was also a positive experience to meet with other colleagues with similar loads and similar concerns. I have no counterpart in my department, so my frustration is usually pent up. I know for certain this process has made me a better teacher and has given me motivation to continue to make positive change at UNL for as long as the department will allow.