

Author conversations

On inspiring students

David Laibson

Harvard University

I want the student to have a personal transformation. I want them to see the world in a completely new light. I want them to take the tools that are provided when you first confront economics and suddenly understand the world differently. To see everything through this alternative lens, not to crowd out other lenses, but to give them a new way of understanding the world. It's sort of like you're in an optometrist's office and you've got the foggy ones and then they click — and all of a sudden you see clearly. That's the experience I want.

So there are some very special moments for me that typically come at the end of the semester where often more than one student in a class will come to me at the end of the semester and say, 'I really want to thank you. This course has changed my life.' And that gives me more pleasure than almost any other thing that I ever do. The notion that they have had that transformative experience with economics, and it has changed their personal trajectory. And now, they see everything on a daily basis in a different light. Every time they walk into a mall, they're thinking about the choices differently than they were a semester ago. And they're deploying exactly these key tools: optimization, equilibrium, thinking empirically, the data piece. And these tools have given them a different lens to understand the world. To make their own choices, and to interpret the choices of other people. And I love it, at the end of the semester when, typically, three-four-five students in a course will really say that to me, that this experience has given them a different way of seeing the world and has really changed their own trajectory. Those experiences get me going every day and make that whole semester worthwhile.

www.pearson.com