My Favorite Professor: Professor Ben Blau Connects Finance to Real World News of the Day

By Boone Bowles

Dr. Ben Blau, a professor of finance, has a unique philosophy when it comes to teaching, a philosophy that he explains to his students before every difficult assignment or impossible midterm exam. He believes that professors who make students think that they are thinking are loved, while professors who actually make students think are hated. “My goal,” Dr. Blau quips, “is to become your least favorite professor.”

Fortunately for Dr. Blau, he proves his own philosophy false year after year. His teaching is engaging and rigorous. His exams are extremely difficult and require hours of study. He absolutely succeeds in making his students think. Yet at the same time he is entertaining, exciting, helpful, and approachable. Although he has forced me to think through two of his courses, he is anything but my least favorite professor.

Dr. Blau begins all of his classes the same way: he pulls up CNBC.com on the projector and asks the class what is happening today. This inevitably leads to a class-wide discussion on current financial topics, which Dr. Blau then seamlessly transitions into the day’s lesson. Every subject that we covered in the regular curriculum of the course was applied to current news items. He used the discussion time to explain how we would use the information we were learning, and he used CNBC.com to show us how it was being applied in the real world. This activity is strengthened by the enthusiasm Dr. Blau brings to the discussion and by his skill at engaging the class and eliciting participation.

Professor Blau’s enthusiasm does not only come out during the open discussion portion of his class, but it pervades his teaching throughout the class period. Whether he is teaching the capital asset pricing model, explaining arbitrage pricing theory, or branching out into other disciplines such as calculus, statistics, and business management, he is always excited and entertaining.

Dr. Blau’s excellence as a teacher is matched by his ability as an advisor and mentor. He has spent several afternoons with me discussing research, my coursework, and my future, and I know he has done the same with many other students. He has been encouraging and helpful in every interaction.

Professor Blau is successful at making his students work, stretch, and think. His teaching style and general charisma betray him, however, as he fails to be anyone’s least favorite professor.