Gabriel Ehrlich
Teaching Statement

Over the ten years that I have studied Economics, I have learned from a wide variety of teachers with a wide variety of teaching styles. I always try to keep my experiences as a student near the front of my mind as I teach, because I find that it is a simple matter to lose sight of what makes Economics so challenging for students. Reflecting on my time as a student and considering the feedback I have received from my own students, I have come to embrace the notions of clarity, rigor, and accessibility as the organizing principles of my teaching philosophy.

I aspire to present economic concepts as succinctly and simply as possible. While this may sound self-evident as a teaching principle, I believe many instructors feel it is preferable to help students see the many subtleties and tensions within economic thought. I think this is a mistake. It is readily apparent to students when the assumptions we make in economics are unrealistic or the models we teach are missing important real-world features. What is less clear is the power of the economic analytical framework. I believe this power will spark their interest in and enthusiasm for the subject. I trust that interested students are more likely to develop a nuanced and critical appreciation of the field than those who are never inspired to enjoy it.

As an undergraduate, I always felt that greater rigor in the Economics major would have served students better. My time teaching at Michigan, which features a very rigorous core undergraduate Economics sequence, has persuaded me further of the merits of a rigorous approach to teaching the field. In my experience, most students who initially believe that the material is too difficult for them work successfully to overcome their difficulties. In return for their troubles, successful students in Michigan’s Economics major develop a potent skill set, including the ability to use formal modeling in their analysis, to communicate their ideas effectively, and to apply quantitative reasoning to everyday situations. I believe setting high standards in class is an essential element in inspiring students to push themselves to develop these skills.

Student feedback has led me to appreciate the importance of accessibility, both inside and outside of the classroom. It is essential that students feel comfortable asking questions in class, even in large lecture formats. I always try to emphasize to my students that if they are confused about the material, it is likely that other students are as well. I believe taking the time to answer questions and treating them respectfully fosters a positive and engaging atmosphere for students. Outside of the classroom, I believe it is important to make students feel welcome at office hours, to answer inquiries promptly, and to demonstrate flexibility in accommodating student requests.

Aside from these guiding principles, I also have some specific thoughts about what I have found to work best in my teaching. I believe it is worthwhile to assign and collect homework. As an undergraduate I always hated this, because I knew I would do well on the exams. As an instructor, I find that homework helps students know whether they are on track and forms the
basis for group work and studying. It also allows students who are not great exam takers to demonstrate mastery of the material. I also like to prepare handouts for students, especially for discussion sections. I find that having a handout helps to organize the discussion, and helps students follow the structure of the discussion and recall the material we covered.

At the undergraduate level, I would enjoy teaching both introductory and intermediate Microeconomics and Macroeconomics. I would also enjoy teaching advanced courses to undergraduates on Financial Economics, Public Economics, and Urban Economics. Additionally, I would take pleasure in teaching Real Estate Finance at both the undergraduate and M.B.A. levels. At the graduate level, I would be interested in teaching part of the first year sequence in Macroeconomics. I could also teach a second year course in Macroeconomics covering computational methods such as Dynare and the Krusell-Smith algorithm for solving heterogeneous agent models, or the application of search and matching models to a Macroeconomic context. I would also be interested in teaching a graduate course in Urban or Public economics.