

Teaching Statement

My overarching goal in the classroom is to instill curiosity and enthusiasm for Economics, and to teach students to enjoy the subject. I want them to engage in the socio-political debates that surround them, and better understand their role as responsible citizens and perhaps future leaders and policy-makers. Driven by these goals, I taught introductory Economics classes for four semesters during my PhD at Michigan. This experience has been fulfilling not just on a personal level, but has also helped me learn how to communicate my research ideas and present them with clarity. Based on my high teaching evaluations and positive feedback from students, I was nominated by the Economics Department for the Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award for every year that I taught.

Over my time teaching, I experimented with various heuristic techniques to discover what worked best. For instance, at first I would explain each concept in great detail, trying to solve as many difficult questions as possible. While this was useful to students, I discovered soon enough, that students thrived far more in a challenging atmosphere. So rather than solving everything for them, I motivated the classes with harder questions, providing small hints here and there to help them along. I found that not only did this push them harder to understand concepts, but also gave them a sense of accomplishment when they solved questions by themselves. Furthermore, this motivated them to come well-prepared for class and develop a sense of confidence in their own abilities.

I also tried different pedagogical tools, and early on, determined what students found the most helpful. Assignments that required students to take a newspaper article, and create an economic model of the arguments made, helped in relating the theoretical material to the debates that take place in the political sphere around us. While teaching, I often made use of contemporary examples from the news, to keep the students engaged. This, in particular, would encourage a lively debate in the classroom, with even quieter students often participating if the news item related to their background or field of interest. This kept the course materials relevant in their minds when they saw they could apply concepts to their understanding of daily life. I further found that using humor to communicate the harder concepts not only made these concepts less intimidating, but that students would also remember these concepts better in the long run.

When talking about economic models in class, I found that students gained a complete understanding of issues when building models step by step, and tweaking them as we proceeded. I made this an interactive exercise where students suggested changes and we discussed the implications of each one, giving them a clear idea of the levers that drove the final results. Through this process, I constantly reminded them of the big-picture questions and the relevance of the topic in today's world.

I usually proceeded with the material by asking questions. This challenged students to think from different points of view – “if you were the car manufacturer, what would you do?” My hope was that even the quieter students were answering the questions mentally, thus keeping all students

immersed in the discussion. In terms of the practical aspect of teaching, I found that using humor kept students engaged and focused. I noticed, also, that a simple thing like learning everyone's names made a huge difference to students' confidence. But having a relaxed atmosphere never meant lowering standards – instead it gave me ample opportunity to gauge interest levels easily. Signaling my readiness to meet in office hours motivated students to make greater use of this time where in-depth analysis was possible.

To assess my teaching methods, I collected feedback early on, and encouraged students to ask questions and participate in a dynamic discussion. I could then continuously observe how comfortable students felt with the material, and vary the pace of the discussion and emphasize topics as required. Questions from students not only addressed lingering queries that most of the class had but also helped create a comfortable and congenial atmosphere. I found that explaining concepts with examples from my own life growing up in India made the subject matter fresh and interesting to students by piquing their curiosity.

I especially encouraged participation from quieter students. For example, I would engage international students, knowing from my own experiences how intimidating it is for a student from abroad to speak-up. I would ask a student about her country's exports and incorporate that into a model. This made the class inclusive and interactive, while also broadening the contexts of study for everyone else. I also shared my own experiences of being an international student, often humorous stories, to put them more at ease, and as classes progressed, I noticed the quieter students opening up in class more and more.

I was gratified by the number of students who expressed an interest in pursuing Economics as their major, and stated their interest in doing so, as at least in part, because of my discussion section. I remember an incident where a student wished to drop the class early on claiming that Economics was not for him. I encouraged him to continue attending my classes and office hours, and he went on to major in Economics and is now applying to graduate school in the subject.

My personal victory as a teacher does not necessarily come with students doing well on an exam. It is a victory when a slightly weaker student starts asking questions in class. When students find the class enjoyable or enriching enough to go on to pursue the advanced courses. When students have not just garnered the basic knowledge required for exams, but also a desire to explore the topic outside of class. But what I value most is the anticipation I feel every semester when I face a new class, and look forward to showing them what an interesting subject Economics is.

Teaching Experience and Student Comments

I am qualified to teach most introductory undergraduate courses, and advanced courses in Development, Labor, Applied Microeconomics, Econometrics, Education and Conflict studies. My full teaching evaluations and student-comments [are available on my website](#). Following are some selected comments from the official university evaluations.

Fall 2011: *“Gaurav was an absolutely fantastic GSI, the best I have had so far at the U of M. He really went out of his way to make sure everyone understood all the concepts, and made the material presented both enjoyable and relatable to the real world. There were times when I felt overwhelmed by the material, and Gaurav did a fantastic job of breaking down all of the concepts and helping me understand how everything was related.”*

“Gaurav claimed this was his first led discussion. This was not evident at all. Gaurav did an excellent job of teaching us the complex concepts while catering to our questions and confusions.”

Winter 2012: *“Gaurav has been an absolute pleasure to learn from--he is by far one of the best instructors I have had at this university, regardless of field of study or in terms of discussion vs. lectures. He is extremely knowledgeable, strives to break down material so it is easily understood, presents in a humorous yet helpful way, and is always always always willing to help. Whoever he teaches next are sure a lucky group of people.”*

“Gaurav was an excellent gsi, I have never had someone care as much as he did for the students' sake of learning. He spent a great deal of time making sure we understood and learned the material as well as answering our questions inside and outside of the classroom. Give this guy a job next year, he deserves it compared to some of the other gsis that were hired for this class.”

Fall 2012: *“Gaurav Khanna was the best GSI I've had at U of M. He was extremely brilliant and was more than willing to help us at office hours. He didn't just tell us how to do the specific questions we asked but he also gave us a deeper understanding of the context at the same time. He was always enthusiastic in class and thought of engaging examples to help us pay attention. He genuinely cared about how we did in the class and sent extra emails to make sure we were on top of things and reminding us of assignments and exams. He also held a ton of extra office hours prior to exams and reviewed material in an efficient manner. He's the best GSI at U of M; he easily could have been teaching the entire class.”*

“Gaurav was the best GSI I have had the experience of interacting with. He was so knowledgeable, interactive, and he really helped me to understand the course material. I would recommend his section to every person I talk to and really appreciate the amount of work he put in to help us succeed.”

Winter 2013: *“I really enjoyed taking this class and I feel like I learned a lot. Gaurav is the best GSI that I have had during my time here at the University of Michigan. He really seemed to understand the material, he made class fun and interesting, and I feel like I learned a lot. Because of a busy schedule, I was not able to go to his office hours but he was more than willing to meet at other times or help me over e-mail.”*

“Honestly one of the best GSI's I've had at this University. Gaurav is extremely intelligent, funny, and knows how to keep students engaged in what we were learning. He did a great job of explaining concepts and preparing us for the exams”