

# Teaching Statement

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## *Teaching Experience*

During my graduate studies at the University of Michigan I have had the opportunity to be a graduate student instructor (GSI, teaching assistant) for three different undergraduate economics courses. At the introductory level, I assisted in teaching *Introduction to Macroeconomics*, but I have also gained experience with advanced undergraduate classes: *European Economy* is a senior-level course that focuses on applying intermediate microeconomics and macroeconomics models to the real-life European context. I have also been a GSI for another advanced undergraduate class, *Government Regulation of Industry*, which expands students' understanding of the theory and real-life complications of anti-trust policy and government regulation in the US.

In all three courses, my main responsibility was to teach regular discussion sections, which mixed teaching new material, expanding on concepts taught in lectures, and going over specific practice problems. Each of these courses had some form of writing requirement, which means that helping students develop their writing skills has also been a substantial part of my role as teaching assistant. *Government Regulation of Industry* specifically satisfied the Upper Level Writing Requirement (ULWR) for undergraduates and included the writing of a term paper through various drafts and detailed comments and feedback provided by the GSIs.

Outside the University of Michigan campus, I was substantially involved in preparing and teaching a two-week course for academics and professionals at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, which introduced participants to working with Stata. In addition to assisting in teaching the course, my work included shared responsibility with the professors in working on the curriculum, handouts and practice exercises as well as managing the logistics in the computer lab during the course.

All of these experiences have allowed me to develop my teaching skills in a variety of settings and to refine my teaching philosophy.

## *Teaching Philosophy*

At all levels of instruction, teaching economics ultimately involves acquainting students with a special way of thinking and of analyzing the world around us. This way of approaching problems becomes an important asset for students, regardless whether they go on to a career in economics or to a professional occupation in a different area.

To achieve this goal, I firmly believe that successful teaching in economics requires the instructor to integrate four different dimensions: mathematical techniques, intuition, real-world connections and a synthesis of ideas. Introducing students to economic models and to the mathematical tools necessary for solving them are an important part of any economics course. My personal experience from being a teaching assistant in a variety of economics courses has shown me, however, that students often lack a strong intuitive understanding of economic concepts even when they can correctly work with the mathematical tools they have learned. Most senior-level students can correctly reproduce the standard monopoly diagram and can find a firm's profit-maximizing choice of output and the corresponding price, for example. But only few of them understand why a monopolist has a marginal revenue curve when we do not talk about one for perfectly competitive firms. Making sure that students see the intuitive connections between model assumptions and results as well as between different theoretical approaches therefore needs to be an integral part of economics teaching as well.

I believe that real-world connections are another feature of a well-designed economics course. Students often learn best when they see the connections between the often abstract economic concepts and real-life issues. The interest of many students in my introductory macroeconomics discussion sections increased substantially once they realized that learning about concepts like inflation or GDP was not just an end in itself, but also enabled them to better understand newspaper articles and to develop more informed opinions about public-policy debates. Similarly, advanced undergraduates were always more enthusiastic about anti-trust policy once they saw how insights from intermediate microeconomic models are used by courts and other institutions to guide their understanding of anti-competitive behavior.

Lastly, I find that a part of teaching that deserves more attention than it often receives is to help students synthesize ideas: Most students work hard to understand individual concepts and models, but struggle with combining different ideas and with applying insights to new contexts. In most occupations this ability is a vital condition for success, however. Some of my most rewarding experiences as a teaching assistant have been to see students grow in their ability to apply their economic knowledge over the course of the semester: Students in an advanced undergraduate class on anti-trust policy were required to analyze an anti-trust court case of their choice from an economic perspective by using intermediate microeconomic concepts and models. And while many students struggled with this assignment at the beginning of the term, I found that with some initial help they were often able to make highly creative use of their acquired tools and of complex and differentiated arguments in the final drafts of their term papers.

Taken together, I therefore think that the integration of these four dimensions should form the backbone of economics teaching. I operationalize these individual components in my teaching in a variety of ways: Once students have some grasp of the material, I emphasize examples, real-life complications, and different ways of approaching the same problem (where possible) while also leaving ample room for questions. This strategy is designed to improve students' intuitive understanding and to connect concepts to issues of real-life relevance. I also often check students' level of understanding by asking them what they expect to happen intuitively in a certain problem before working through it more formally. In my experience, some of the best and most lively class discussions on economic issues have developed in settings where students are challenged to relate economic concepts to the real world, and to think about how to apply standard economic models to specific institutional contexts. Together with regular homework assignments, these class discussions also provide a good way for me to detect common problems in understanding early, and to get a feeling for the level of student intuition and ability to apply ideas to different contexts. I think that occasional more open-ended homework problems also provide the opportunity for good students to consider more complex issues and to sharpen their argumentation and writing skills, while allowing students with a weaker understanding of the material to work through the problem-solving process again.

I also find it helpful to offer students different approaches on problem-solving since students learn in different ways: Some people understand the material best when it is presented graphically, while others prefer a more mathematical approach. Economics teaching often allows the use of both of these methods. Especially during office hours where a more individualized interaction with students is possible, I help students work through problems by using their own preferred way of approaching a problem, rather than providing them with ready-made answers. My impression is that students have found this especially valuable for more open-ended assignments like term papers because I help them build up their own intuition, opinions, and complex arguments rather than imposing my own understanding of the material on them. And once students have successfully worked through this process once, they usually find applying the same general strategies to a new assignment substantially easier.