

## TEACHING STATEMENT

### Teaching Record

- Head Graduate Student Instructor, Introductory Microeconomics (undergraduate), 2011-13  
 Department of Economics, University of Michigan (4 classes, 4 semesters)
- Graduate Student Instructor, Introductory Microeconomics (undergraduate), 2010-11  
 Department of Economics, University of Michigan (4 classes, 2 semesters)
- Graduate Student Instructor, Intermediate Microeconomics (undergraduate), 2010  
 Department of Economics, University of Michigan (2 classes, 1 semester)
- Graduate Student Instructor, European Economy (undergraduate), 2009  
 Department of Economics, University of Michigan (2 classes, 1 semester)

### Teaching Evaluations

While at the University of Michigan, I have taught as a graduate student instructor. Graduate student instructors hold sections that supplement the general lecture taught by a faculty member. As head graduate student instructor, I wrote quizzes, oversaw other graduate student instructors, helped construct exams and assisted with other administrative responsibilities of the class.

Each semester, the University of Michigan solicits feedback from students regarding their opinion on a range of topics related to their course. Each student ranks their opinion between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The table below gives the average of the response to the statement "*The instructor was an excellent teacher,*" and includes the school median and 75th percentile. The complete questionnaires (with 30 questions linked to student comments), a complete summary of student responses (good and bad) and a summary of scores by class are available on my website:  
<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mojusaun/>.

Table 1: Teaching Evaluations at the University of Michigan

|                                | Own  | School<br>Median | School<br>75% |
|--------------------------------|------|------------------|---------------|
| Overall                        | 4.41 | 4.39             | 4.73          |
| Last 4<br>Semesters            | 4.69 | 4.38             | 4.73          |
| Introductory<br>Microeconomics | 4.45 | 4.34             | 4.70          |
| Intermediate<br>Microeconomics | 4.4  | 4.57             | 4.83          |
| European<br>Economy            | 4.23 | 4.42             | 4.74          |

Students are also encouraged to provide feedback. Select student comments include:

- “Molly was a great GSI. She had a good method for writing down notes and was helpful in providing other examples of lessons we had learned in class. She was also great to meet with in her office hours. Probably the best GSI for Econ 101.” (Winter 2013)
- “Molly was a great GSI. She explained concepts exceptionally well and she was always very prepared for the discussion class. I was very impressed with her ability to answer all questions as well as her professional approach to every class period. ” (Fall 2012)
- “I learned many things that i otherwise would not have know. It was explained to me in simple manner which i needed as i had never studied economics before. The instructor was patient and always willing to help. She was very helpful. Im glad she was my GSI .” (Fall 2011)
- “Molly was an excellent teacher. She was organized, clear, and I enjoyed having her. ” (Fall 2010)
- “Molly was a great teacher and was very enthusiastic. Teaching a mostly freshman class is difficult because a lot of students do not feel comfortable talking, but I felt she handled the situation very well.” (Winter 2010)
- “Really good preparation. She was able to break down the material so that it was understandable. She was also very easy to talk to and contact outside of class. ” (Fall 2009)

### **Teaching Interests**

The majority of my teaching experience has been in undergraduate microeconomics, and I believe that has given me the preparation needed to teach any of the core economics courses. I think that one of my greatest strengths as a teacher is my patience, which is particularly valuable in courses where many of the students initially find the material to be confusing. I would be especially excited to teach classes related to my research interests in public finance and corporate taxation, but would also be happy to teach classes in labor economics and economic history.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

To me, one of the most important parts of teaching is adapting, both to my own strengths and weaknesses and to the learning style and level of each class. Having taught a variety of classes, I quickly realized that a teaching approach that worked perfectly in intermediate microeconomics was unlikely to work perfectly in introductory microeconomics. In much the same way, I also began to realize that it was important not only to teach in a way that suited the class, but also to teach in a way that felt natural to me. While some teachers may feel most comfortable teaching material through organized activities and fun examples, I realized my comparative advantage was being able to explain material clearly and patiently, and that is the strength I play to the most when I teach. As I became confident in these strengths, I began to enjoy teaching even more and I became a better teacher, as reflected both in my student reviews and in how I felt when I finished teaching a class. In teaching, I seek to make class valuable, I continue to regularly reflect on how best to teach the material, and I seek to help students understand the process of answering a question, not just the answer.

One of the most fulfilling parts of teaching is being able to help students understand something that, at first glance, they found confusing. Partially for that reason, I have found that the classes that are “easy” from the student perspective are in many ways actually the hardest to teach. Generally, students are far more receptive when they feel they need help, and that makes teaching a more rewarding

experience. My most challenging teaching experience was when I taught a class filled with junior and senior-level economics majors, who, for the most part, felt like they did not need the discussion section. While it is almost impossible to make every single student feel that class is valuable, that semester taught me the importance of working hard to make sure that students actually feel they are getting something from coming to class. Over the course of the semester, I learned to integrate activities that helped students in the process of writing the essay that was required for the course. That helped discussion section feel more enjoyable for me as a teacher and more useful for the students. More generally, to make class useful, I always use a mixture of lecturing and working through examples. If students get lost while I am lecturing, working through an example gives me an opportunity to reengage them. By discussing alternative questions that could have been asked, or extensions to these examples, I am also able to provide material that interests the students who already have a good grasp of the basic material I am discussing.

As an instructor, I spent six semesters teaching for the same class. That enabled me to see how the material for that class adapted over time. Even having taught the class for decades, the instructor was still adjusting the organization of the material and her explanations. While many graduate instructors feel frustrated teaching a class they have not organized, only focusing on where they think they would be able to do a better job, the experience emphasized for me that some subset of students will always be confused by a given method or order. Each semester of teaching is an opportunity to better understand what confuses students and what you can do to reduce that confusion for as many students as possible. I have found that doing things such as integrating multiple explanations (graphical, intuitive, numerical, etc.), not just the one that I find most natural, has allowed me both to increase my own understanding of the material and to help as many students as possible. Overall, even when teaching the same material again and again, teaching needs to remain a dynamic process.

I believe it is extremely important to push students towards understanding concepts, not just memorizing graphs and tricks. I think the most valuable thing an instructor can do is to explain the mode of thinking that is needed to be able to look at current events through the frame of economics. Depending on the level of the class, this may be a simple reminder of topics and models covered in past classes, or it may be building the concepts up from the ground level. In many ways, the lessons taught in economics classes, especially introductory level classes, are intuitive. While this means that students often think that the material makes sense when others explain it to them, it does not mean that it is easy for students to reproduce the thought process on their own. I think this is the reason that so many students are shocked by how hard exams seem relative to the material discussed in class. There is a big leap between understanding what is said and being able to apply that thought process to a new question or situation. In class and office hours, pushing students towards explaining the process, not just the answer, is key to helping students succeed. Another way I help students understand the process is to make sure that I am always explaining the thought process that I use. By breaking the question down into the steps I follow, and not simply asking the class if anyone can solve the problem through from beginning to end, I am able to both encourage participation from students who are confident about a given step, but not the entire problem, and I am able to emphasize the thought process that should be used for that type of question.