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Teaching Statement  
Department of Economics  
University of Michigan  
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

While a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, I have had the opportunity to teach as a graduate student instructor (TA) at both the undergraduate and Ph.D. level. I have consistently received high evaluations and won an award for being one of the top graduate student instructors in the department. In addition, I sought out an opportunity to work with professors at Oberlin College to prepare a curriculum and material to teach modeling in their undergraduate classes. At the University of Michigan I served as the graduate student instructor for the undergraduate game theory course (Economics 409; 1 semester), the Ph.D. game theory course (Economics 602; 2 semesters), and the Ph.D. general equilibrium course (Economics 603; 1 semester). The goals for the sections I taught were to provide concrete methods for solving problems and to provide supplemental material not covered in the lectures. In addition, during the summers of 2010 and 2011 the economics department selected me to teach a microeconomics preliminary exam preparation course. In this course I developed a curriculum to cover all of the material in the first-year Ph.D. microeconomics sequence to prepare students for their upcoming exam. I have also guest lectured in the undergraduate urban economics course (Economics 487), the Ph.D. public finance course (Economics 684), and the Ph.D. natural resource economics course (Economics 661). I greatly enjoy working with students and find the experience of helping them understand new concepts very rewarding. These opportunities have allowed me to grow professionally and refined my teaching philosophy.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY:

Economics provides a framework for thinking about the world around us. My belief is that the central objective of any economics course should be to sharpen the critical thinking ability of students. One of the best ways I have found to do so is to relate the course material to their lives. For example, the concept of first-mover advantage can be applied to the everyday situation in which a group of friends are trying to decide where to go out for dinner. When students make these connections they are amazed at how relevant and fascinating economics is. I find students are then more interested in learning the material and are able to learn it more completely.

It is important for students to apply the concepts of economics in order to learn and master them. When I teach backwards induction I start with a game where two players sequentially take turns as they count from one to twenty-one in which each player has the choice of saying one, two, or three numbers in the sequence. For example, if your opponent ended by saying the number ten, you would have the option of saying eleven, twelve, or thirteen. The objective of the game is to force your opponent to say twenty-one. Using this game allows the concept of backwards induction to become intuitive because it formalizes the thought process the students just went through. To master this concept I provide students with the opportunity to apply this concept in a variety of contexts through problem sets and supplementary problems.

I find it important for me and for students to continually assess their progress in mastering the concepts in the course. There is a lot of learning that takes place between students hearing about
a concept in lecture, applying the concept in a problem set, and being able to apply the concept on a test (which hopefully is a good proxy for the real world). To demonstrate this to students I give them informal written quizzes. The quizzes do not affect their grade but provide an opportunity for the student to assess whether they are able to apply the concepts in a test like situation. In my experience students are surprised that they are unable to apply the concept even though they understood the concept in lecture. Periodically I collect the quizzes to assess how well the students are mastering the material.

An important challenge in any course is to engage students with a wide range of learning styles and previous knowledge of the course. In the Ph.D. game theory course, I taught students who had never had a game theory course alongside students who had taken undergraduate and graduate courses on game theory. I have also found that game theory is a class that can be particularly challenging for some students because it is a paradigm shift in the way they think about the world, which is also why I have really enjoyed teaching it. Because of these challenges I have discovered that it is important to provide different sources for the material and a variety of applications.

I have greatly enjoyed my experiences as an instructor. I believe critical thinking is crucial to every student’s education and that economics provides an important framework for thinking about the world around us. While most students who take an economics course do not major in economics these courses provide students with a framework to think about the costs and benefits of decisions they make and help them evaluate government policies. I am passionate about teaching economics because I believe the only way to solve hard problems facing society is to think critically about the problems and correctly evaluate the costs and benefits of any proposed solution.

TEACHING INTERESTS:

My teaching interests span a broad spectrum of courses, including public economics, urban economics, game theory, industrial organization, as well as broader courses on microeconomics. I have enjoyed teaching game theory and the fundamentals of microeconomics and look forward to opportunities to teach in areas close to my research interests.

SELECTED STUDENT WRITTEN COMMENTS:

At the end of every academic term the University of Michigan requests that students anonymously fill out evaluations of their courses and instructors. The evaluations have an opportunity to write additional comments. Below I provide a sample of comments I have received across the courses I have taught. The original evaluation forms that include all comments are available upon request.

Nathan is a phenomenal GSI. He clearly explained the material while making it fun and engaging.
- Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2012.

Nathan is a great GSI. He’s always well prepared and he presents the material clearly.
- Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2012.

Nathan is an excellent GSI. He has a great command of the material. He maintains a cheerful classroom atmosphere. He obviously puts in a lot of effort.
- Student Economics 603 General Equilibrium, 2011.
The GSI was excellent. The GSI explained everything very clearly and put a great deal of effort into the homework solutions. The GSI also gave many useful prelim tips as well as some additional knowledge of the material that went beyond the scope of the course.

-Student Economics 603 General Equilibrium, 2011.

Nathan is a very good GSI. He is prepared for all sections and clearly explains concepts that were not adequately covered in class. He’s willing to answer all questions and tailors the speed of this section to the level of understanding within the class.

-Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2010.

Nathan was by the far the best GSI I’ve ever had at Michigan. (I’m a Junior undergrad here). He [was] always on top of the material and kept the hour and a half discussion interesting even though it was either in the very early morning or late at night. He welcomed questions and did whatever was necessary so the students could learn this material. He’ll make a good prof.

-Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2010.

Nathan did an excellent job. He went well beyond what was required of him to make sure students had many, many opportunities to learn. He was without any doubt the best GSI that the first-year economics students had.

-Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2010.

The instructor was exactly what a student would want: engaging, engaged, funny and knowledgeable, with the depth of knowledge to answer difficult questions, and the flexibility to help students in whatever way necessary to help them learn the material.

-Student Economics 602 Game Theory, 2010.

**SUMMARY NUMERICAL EVALUATIONS:**

At the end of every academic term the University of Michigan requests that students anonymously fill out evaluations of their courses and instructors. The numerical part of the evaluations consists of students selecting one of the following predetermined statements for a list of questions about the course and the instructor.

5 = Strongly Agree
4 = Agree
3 = Neutral
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly Disagree

Below I provide a summary of these responses averaged across class and across students. The original disaggregated documents are available upon request.
Overall, The instructor was an excellent teacher.  
  University wide average  
  The instructor explained material clearly and understandably.  
  The instructor handled questions well.  
  The instructor seemed to enjoy teaching  
  The instructor was not confused by unexpected questions  
  The instructor was skillful in observing student reactions.  
  The instructor maintained an atmosphere of good feeling in class.  
  The instructor treated students with respect.  
  The instructor was willing to meet and help students outside class.  
  The instructor seemed well prepared for each class.  
  I learned a great deal from this course.  
  I learned a good deal of factual material in this course.  
  I gained a good understanding of concepts/principles in this field.  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Across Class</th>
<th>Mean Across Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University wide average</td>
<td>(4.55)</td>
<td>(4.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor explained material clearly and understandably.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor handled questions well.</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor seemed to enjoy teaching</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was not confused by unexpected questions</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was skillful in observing student reactions.</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor maintained an atmosphere of good feeling in class.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor treated students with respect.</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was willing to meet and help students outside class.</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor seemed well prepared for each class.</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned a great deal from this course.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned a good deal of factual material in this course.</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gained a good understanding of concepts/principles in this field.</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The mean across class averages the average scores for each class.  
The mean across students averages the scores across students.  
The difference in means exists because different numbers of evaluations exist across classes.

**TEACHING REFERENCES:**

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