

Teaching Statement

While exploring the world with your own personal research can be enlightening, there are few things I find more rewarding than seeing the glint of academic curiosity in the eye of a student and giving them the tools to help them act on it. That is why I hold my duties as a teacher to be just as important as my research.

My personal teaching philosophy is to emphasize a one-on-one dialogue between student and teacher, even in a class of twenty or eighty people. No matter how big your class is, make sure that you give everyone a chance to let their voice be heard. With the limited time teachers have in the classroom, the urge to have a standardized approach tailored to fit most students is understandable. Yet, the reality is there is no real one size fits all approach to teaching. Often what might make a concept or approach click for one student may not work for another. Anyone who has tried to describe a signaling game as “Beer-Quiche” knows this well. That’s why I try my best to not only tackle ideas from multiple angles but create an environment in which students are incentivized to speak out and know that they are heard when they do. I supply examples for imitative learners, prepare worksheets for those who learn by doing, and hold discussions for those who learn through conversation. But the most important part, in my mind, is that students know that it’s alright to try a new approach if the one we’re currently using doesn’t fit them. Not everyone’s academic path is the same and that’s okay.

I approach teaching this way because of how my life experiences and personal struggles with mental health have shaped my academic career. Growing up with ADD and clinical anxiety, I was much less receptive to classes designed around lectures when compared to my peers. I encountered particular difficulties when I sharpened my focus on economics as the workload is often heavy and the stress, compounded by the self doubt my anxiety created, left me exhausted and discouraged. It was only after reaching out for help that I realized my path to learning is very different but no less effective or important. I am much better suited to learning by doing and having a massive amount of work to bounce my ideas off of. At the same time, I felt it important to have humility and admit that many of my peers around me did thrive from approaches that didn’t necessarily suit me. To reach both the many and the few there is not one best approach, there are only best *approaches*.

With this in mind, I do what I can to create an environment in the classroom that incentivizes students to speak out and is conducive to a broader dialogue. One way I attempt to achieve this is by taking actions to minimize the stress of academic work. I use timed exams and exercises sparingly, and try to give students ample time in cases when these measures are necessary or appropriate. Students need time to breathe and overloading them can push some down an anxiety spiral. I try to foster an environment where students understand that it’s okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Yet, this isn’t to imply I am soft in my approach. To the contrary, I have a reputation for

challenging students with difficult questions. Just as open book exams are typically tougher than closed book ones, when a student is less restricted there should be higher expectations for their output. What's important is the change in outlook. It's often much better to try and tackle a difficult question or ambitious research goal and fail than do an easy task perfectly but never leave your comfort zone. Whether or not students feel safe enough to explore is typically the deciding factor in whether or not students are receptive to this idea. This freedom allows students to learn what does and does not work for them, and their instructor in turn can use this to push them to greater heights without shattering their confidence.

It is equally important to give students the chance to speak to each other and make a space within the classroom for this. The reality is learning can at times be a taxing and long winded process with not everything clicking right away. Being able to confide in other students who may face the same struggles can be massively reassuring as it shows you that you aren't alone and there's nothing wrong with feeling doubt or confusion. Even in instances where a student's struggles might be unique, working in groups can allow them to lean on the strengths of their peers when in a bind and still make worthwhile contributions that can help them build their confidence. A student's peers might also tackle an idea from an angle the instructor never considered. In these instances it's important that students feel safe to lean on the advice of their peers and use it in tandem with the advice of their instructors. This is why every class I teach incorporates some aspect of peer review. So much of the process of learning is not just understanding the base concepts you are discussing, but knowing how to improve upon your work and where to look when you feel you've hit a wall. Having students understand that they can rely on each other frees them to be able to conduct their research in a way that best suits them. It also helps them understand one of the most important truths of academic research: There is power in numbers.

Finally, I believe it is important to remember that my responsibilities to my students do not end at the classroom. I think of myself not just as a teacher but an advocate for my students, and this means understanding their boundaries and being willing to act when I believe they might be trampled upon. Much too often I've seen instances where instructors have taken understandable but ultimately unfair actions against students to deal with bad actors. The measures taken during the Covid pandemic are a great example of this. Forcing students to use lockdown browsers and giving over control of their webcams was commonplace to deal with the real problem of cheating in remote classes. Yet, this always felt to me like a huge invasion of privacy and caused issues for many financially disadvantaged students.

I believe being able to adapt in a way that respects students' dignity and their rights as academics is paramount to building a good relationship with them. That's why, during this period, I did my best to avoid taking the easy way out and rework my entire teaching plan to fit the scenario. For example, instead of doing a traditional timed exam

for my “Econometrics” class that could be difficult to protect from cheating behavior in a remote setting, I replaced it with an empirical paper assignment. I’ve carried this mentality forward into my other classes by writing assignments that allow students to use the resources they have at hand and using course materials that do not require large purchases from students to accommodate those who may not be as financially stable. Being an advocate also means being a resource that students can reach out to. Discussions of issues like mental health can be very scary for students given the stigmas that might surround the subject, and it can keep them from reaching out. It’s important to me that my students feel they can trust me enough to confide in me and don’t feel like they have to fight their battles alone. Understanding how to guide students through academia is one thing, but being part of someone’s support system can change a person’s life forever and for the better, and if I can serve anyone in that capacity I feel it is my duty to do so. That’s why it’s so important that I hear every student out when I have the chance.

Ultimately, I believe this personal philosophy has been instrumental in helping me grow into a well rounded teacher. Giving everyone a chance to be heard takes a lot of investment and diligence, but I feel it’s paid off in building self-confidence in my students. It’s also led me to test my own limits as an educator. I’ve proven myself to be very flexible with my experience teaching in the Summer as well as the Fall and Spring and the range of classes I have taught or tutored from Econometrics to Writing to Symbolic Logic to Macroeconomics. One’s learning journey is never over, and I am eternally grateful to get the chance to see what my students can teach me just as much as I can teach them. And often talking with my students and showing them all that economics has to offer can rekindle and grow that same creative spark within me. Economics is so much more than the analysis of financial decisions and cash flows that it is often mistaken as, and more than anything I want a chance to show others the beauty of it like my advisors and mentors have done for me before.