

TEACHING STATEMENT

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“Teaching is leaving a vestige of one self in the development of another. And surely the student is a bank where you can deposit your most precious treasures.” – Eugene P. Bertin

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

During my Ph.D. at the Southern Methodist University (SMU), I have had the opportunity to teach intermediate macroeconomics as a lecturer for two semesters (summer 2015 and spring 2016). This is the second course in undergraduate macroeconomics sequence (the first being principles of macroeconomics) in SMU and is generally offered to sophomores, juniors and seniors having the necessary background in economics and mathematics. I have also worked as a teaching assistant for several Ph.D. level courses including microeconometrics and applied econometrics, and for several undergraduate courses including principles of microeconomics, labor economics, public economics, and behavioral and experimental economics between fall 2012 and summer 2016. Additionally, during my visit to my home in Kolkata, India in summers of 2014 and 2016, I have briefly lectured at my undergraduate and graduate institutions on recent advancements in development and behavioral economics.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I believe that as an economics teacher, I have a threefold objective: stimulating students’ interest in the subject matter, making students realize the ‘real world’ relevance of what they are learning, and fostering critical thinking skills among the students. Achieving these three goals have always motivated my own teaching. In order to achieve these goals, I employ a set of strategies that can be summarized into three broad tenets: creating an active learning environment, developing a strong rapport with my students and giving effective feedback to the students. In what follows, I discuss each of these tenets briefly.

Active involvement of students for effective learning – connecting theory to real world. Learning is an active process. As such, it is important for students to be effectively involved in class. For keeping students actively involved and fostering student participation, I believe that teaching solely based on textbooks is insufficient. In addition to class lectures, homeworks and exams, I think making students aware of real world social and economic events related to what they are learning in class is necessary for fostering student involvement. For example, when I was teaching the courses in intermediate macroeconomics, while I did use Greg Mankiw’s ‘Macroeconomics’ (8th/9th edition) as my main textbook, in order to make students aware of current macroeconomic-affairs, I used to regularly post relevant articles on ‘Canvas’ (an online learning management system designed to complement classroom teaching) from newspapers, magazines and blogs including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* and *The Economist*, which they could read during their leisure time. Additionally, I also used to recommend them to listen to various interesting podcasts of radio-stations including *The Economist* and *Freakonomics* on their cell-phones and tablets. I found many students to be extremely interested in these materials and some of them would often come to discuss these with me after class or during my office hours. I believe that if students are able to connect what they learn in class to the real world, this not only increases their motivation to learn the subject, but also from a broader perspective, makes learning socially relevant and useful.

Another route that I often take to augment student participation is that I discuss some recent economic issue in class and ask students to think about the issue in terms of a specific economic model that they have learned. For instance, just before I started teaching intermediate macroeconomics for the second time (i.e., in spring 2016), the Federal Reserve Bank (Fed) had announced a quarter-point increase in its target funds rate in the United States, after seven years of the most accommodative monetary policy in U.S. history. The

main reasons behind the increase in the target funds rate, as cited by Dr. Janet Yellen, the Chair of the Board of Governors of the Fed, were first, to encourage investment and job creation, and second, to control inflation. This announcement, quite naturally, attracted a massive media coverage and a huge debate on whether the increase in target funds rate was necessary followed. So, after I had finished teaching the chapters on ‘Money’ and ‘Inflation’ (Chapters 4 and 5, Mankiw, Macroeconomics) in class where the students learned about the concepts of money supply, money multipliers, Fisher’s equation, expected inflation etc., I asked them to analyze the recent decision of Fed and examine its potential effect on the key macroeconomic variables and think deeply about the mechanism through which Fed’s policy might affect these variables. The main purpose of such discussions are to make students see the relevance of the things they are learning (“Wow, I can analyze Dr. Janet Yellen’s policy like an economist!”) and foster critical thinking among them. Additionally, I also set questions based on real world events in homeworks and exams which compels students to apply the theory that they learn in class in examining real world events. For instance, in one of my intermediate macroeconomics exams, I had a question that asked students to analyze the economic impacts of the influx of Syrian refugees to the Western European countries on the wage, interest, and unemployment rates of those countries. While assessing student responses to such questions, I put more emphasis on evaluating how the students have thought about the problem and what economic model they have used in analyzing it rather than just looking at whether the final answer is correct or not. I believe such exercises are essential for increasing students’ confidence about their analytical skills.

Rapport – the key factor in getting students to trust their teacher. An essential cornerstone of effective learning is that the students must be able to fully trust their teachers. As such it is not only necessary for a teacher to possess qualities like honesty and integrity (that are essential ingredients of a trust-worthy person), but it is also important that the students are actually able to ‘see’ these qualities in the instructor. The chief way, I believe, in which an instructor can ‘show’ these qualities to his/her students and gain their trust and confidence is by developing a ‘genuine’ rapport with them, both inside and outside the classroom. I think, for developing rapport with the students, a teacher in addition to being a good speaker (willing to talk also about issues that may not be directly related to the course), must also be a good listener who is ‘genuinely’ interested in listening to his/her students, and who does not have a condescending attitude when communicating with them. For instance, many a times, I have had students come to me during my office hours seeking to discuss various issues regarding their future career (for e.g., “I am applying for an internship; Professor, can you please take a look at my cover letter and let me know your thoughts on it?”) and personal issues (like, health problems, family issues, issues with funding undergraduate studies). I have always sincerely tried to make time for my students to hear them and give them suggestions and advice. I know that being an international graduate student myself, I do not have much capacity in solving the problems of my students except for offering suggestions/advice that might help them a little bit. Strikingly, I find that these little advices/suggestions mean a lot to the students and they are extremely appreciative of it. I understood that I was at least partially successful in developing a genuine rapport with my students, when in March 2016, I received the following email from a student who was in my intermediate macroeconomics class:

“Dear Professor/ I just wanted to inform you that my mom was diagnosed cancer free last week and she is now doing well. Just wanted to thank you for all your support that has helped me to become very strong from within. / Warm regards...”

I firmly believe that such trust fosters learning massively. Needless to say, for a student, the phrase “You can do it!” coming from a teacher whom he/she can blindly trust has an entirely different meaning from that coming from a teacher who makes no effort in gaining confidence of his/her students. In future, I would like to work more on building rapport with my students by making use of various social media platforms (e.g., by building a Facebook page and a Twitter account exclusively for my class).

Effective feedback for enhancing students’ performance. I feel, giving effective and timely feedback to students is very important for students to do well in any course. I try to give feedback to my students on their performance in homeworks and exams in such a way that students become aware of not only where

they have gone wrong, but also what they should have done instead and why they should have done this. I have always believed that just pointing out mistakes is not enough for effective learning (then I am just an editor, not a teacher!). A good teacher must not only be able to tell a student where he/she has gone wrong, but also be willing to discuss at length with a student why he/she has made this mistake (this helps clear misconceptions that the student might have) and what the correct way of approaching the question/problem is. In other words, my feedback is aimed towards correcting the way the students think about a question/problem in which they have made a mistake and helping them to identify the root of the question/problem, rather than just post/recite the answer keys. I also take great care in dealing with students who, for some reason, are not able to perform well in the exams despite putting in significant effort towards the course (in terms of attending classes, submitting homeworks on time, etc.). I generally request such students to meet me during my office hours for a one-to-one discussion and try to figure out exactly why they are not being able to do well in the exams. I also ask them whether they would benefit if I alter my way of teaching (“Do you want me to slow down the pace of my lectures?”; “Would you benefit if I give you more practice problems to work on?”; Do you want me to post the lecture slides *before* class instead of *after* class?). My experience is that such one-to-one sessions are generally very effective in the sense that during the course of these discussions I am able to help most of the students understand exactly where they are falling short and how exactly they need to work in order to augment their performance. Remarkably, I have found most of such students, who might have got a grade of B or B- in the first exam (despite doing well in their homeworks) have improved a lot in the later exams and ended up with a course grade of A.

TEACHING INTERESTS

I am interested in teaching *undergraduate* courses in microeconomics and macroeconomics, and *undergraduate* as well as *graduate* courses in applied econometrics, development economics, labor economics and household economics. I would also like to teach to an elective course in social economics at the graduate level that would utilize insights from behavioral economics and social psychology to understand how social factors like peer effects, neighborhood effects, and social networks influence human behavior. This course would ideally be a combination of applied theory, econometrics (more specifically, spatial and network econometrics) and laboratory experiments, and have applications in various domains like economics of consumption, health economics, labor economics and public economics.
