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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching is intertwined with my interests in economics research, since I feel that teaching and research are complementary to each other. While being strongly committed to research and often being thrilled by the research process of identifying and solving economic puzzles, I have a zest for conveying these thrills to the students. I believe that continuous interaction with fresh minds through teaching could make research more proactive and productive. My passion for teaching has also been kindled by many great professors with whom I have been privileged to study throughout my graduate education at Duke University and Boston University. Collectively, they have been a major source of motivation for me to pursue a career in academia and to become a dedicated professor who can hopefully inspire future students as well.

During my Ph.D. program study at Boston University, I have dedicated much of my time to working as a teaching fellow on various courses such as Introduction to Microeconomics, Health Economics, Behavior Economics, and Game Theory. These courses have given me ample experience creating and grading problem sets and exam questions while also interacting with students during office hours and review sections. In contrast with most other graduate students, I was given the tremendous opportunity to be the instructor (fully responsible) of the health economics course at the Boston University during my fourth year, in which diverse juniors from different universities attended a summer school. My responsibilities for this position included designing my own syllabus and course materials, creating problem sets and exams, and teaching the content in lectures. It was a challenge, but also a confirming and rewarding experience to teach students from a multitude of diverse backgrounds. By guiding the students in summer school, I also learned new ways to think about the issues that I would have otherwise overlooked. Thus, I feel that I have taken full advantage of the wonderful teaching opportunity. In addition, I have gained valuable experience serving as a teaching assistant for large sections of introductory economics when I was a master student at the Department of Economics, Duke University; I also have served as a teaching assistant for independent sections of Introductory Statistics at Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Duke University. As a result, I have acquired extensive teaching experience as an instructor and teaching assistant for different courses and school settings, as well as students with highly diverse academic backgrounds.

I strive to instill the “economic” way of thinking to help students think critically and analytically as well as to help them develop a strong grasp of various concepts and tools within the field of economics. I will be satisfied if my students learn to think like economists and can apply that paradigm to tackle the problems in the real world. To achieve this goal, I focus on establishing three main aspects for my teaching in particular: lectures that foster intuitive understanding and critical thinking, assessments that stimulate independent work, and an open learning environment that nurtures questioning and collaboration.

First of all, I strive to foster intuitive understanding of the principal ideas. In that regard, I like to incorporate more real-world examples into my lectures to illustrate economic concepts in a more relatable way. I begin and end each lectures with open questions, as a process of engaging with the course material and examining new insights that economics reveals. To make technical material entertaining, I present rich examples in my lectures that students encounter in their everyday practicalities, such as buying hamburgers versus sandwiches for lunch and taking subways versus walking versus bicycling to schools. In that way, students can feel included in the conversation and apply concepts to situations where economic tools provide new insights on topics relevant to their lives. In order to draw students’ attention to contemporary issues and apply what they learned, I also ask every student to give a presentation, which provides a unique opportunity to present students with a perspective on the debates that shaped modern economics, together with a structured theoretical curriculum and discussions of current affairs.
Economics has broad applicability to all aspects of society, which is a precise way to describe and analyze real-world situations and an approach to solving problems that, if mastered, will serve the student a lifetime. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," which is a Chinese famous proverb and my mantra. To extrapolate the concepts to real world contexts, I also regularly email students links to articles of current events to which the concepts can be applied. In addition, I believe that conducting frontier research and integrating the research with teaching is an effective way to empower students to be self-motivated problem-solvers. Economics research offers good examples of how to identify and solve problems with the analytical tools taught in classes. Furthermore, I am committed to enriching course materials through my own research activities, drawing from cutting-edge contributions to research. By connecting current news, frontier research or students’ own experiences to the topics discussing in class, students could leverage their understanding of how the different concepts and tools are interconnected and combine the various ideas to approach complex problems in real life.

Secondly, I believe assessment that stimulates independent work is important for learning. I prefer student centered interactive approaches to evaluate and assess students’ understanding, which could keep students engaged and make them feel passionate about the subject. I use open and general questions to involve students in class, and I find that by doing this, students are highly motivated to search for relevant information and articulate their own opinions. In addition to a spoken lecture, I always write key ideas and draw graphs on the board. I always introduce the important contents that will be covered at the beginning of every class and review them before exams, so that students know what is expected of them. Similarly, I give homework problems and in-class exercises that prepare students for the type of questions they will encounter on the exams. Furthermore, I strive to be available to my students and responsive to their needs. I always come to class ten minutes early to actively communicate with students, either by answering questions or just some small talk. As the motivation is relatively low in summer courses, I regularly send reminders about course progress, homework, and exams. Moreover, I keep tracking students' performance and spend extra time on individual students who may need assistance. Students are also welcome to make an appointment outside of office hours if they need extra help. Besides making grading standards transparent, I maintain a policy that I will respond to any email within 12 hours and give all problem sets and exams graded back within 48 hours. I believe it is important to get frequent feedback from students as to their progress so they can adjust their learning strategies, and I can be made aware of how students are doing and what areas merit revisiting. In my health economics classes, these take the form of in-class quizzes, class discussions to reflect on readings, writing assignments that encourage students to synthesize and apply course concepts, and peer and self-assessments that allow reflection on projects and presentations.

Finally, I make certain to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning where dialogue flows between students and the instructor. This atmosphere requires student participation, treating students fairly and with respect, and it requires sensitivity to students’ varying perspectives and backgrounds. As such, I encourage students to actively participate in discussions, active learning exercises, and group work. I like to promote teamwork in a think-pair-share model among students, which offers a different opportunity for active questioning on a peer level. By encouraging team work, students can supplement each other’s insights and provide each other with alternative approaches to the same problems. The friendly participatory learning environment allows students to take ownership of the education product, help to shape and mold it in a way that is reflective of their own cognitive style, and uncover and help each other complete gaps in their understanding.

To be a successful instructor, I constantly seek ways to improve my teaching, such as attending pedagogy workshops through Boston University’s Graduate School and Teaching IDEAS workshop at Duke University. In addition to my prior demonstrated teaching experience such as in microeconomics (all levels), health economics, and development economics, I would welcome the opportunity to teach courses beyond these fields to expand my teaching portfolio. The combination of my academic background and teaching experience has made me well prepared, adding to my enthusiasm for teaching economics, my passion for the subject and my desire to strive for excellence. It is my calling and my continuing adventure to teach my students to become motivated, insightful, and enthusiastic thinkers.