TEACHING STATEMENT

Ashwin Kambhampati
Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania
Website: ashwinkambhampati.com
E-mail: akambh@sas.upenn.edu

I have been interested in and involved in teaching and student mentorship since I was an undergraduate student at Oberlin College, where I oversaw a weekly computer lab session for introductory econometrics and served as a peer advisor to incoming students as they transitioned to college life. As a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania, I have developed further as a teacher and mentor: I was a teaching assistant for five different economics courses at the introductory, intermediate, and graduate levels; taught Intermediate Microeconomics as the sole instructor in the College of Liberal and Professional Studies; and pursued advanced training in teaching at the Center for Teaching and Learning, where I participated in a series of workshops and received critical feedback about my teaching. My consistently high teaching evaluations have been recognized by the Department of Economics, who awarded me the Joel Popkin Graduate Student Teaching Prize in 2018.

My overarching goal as an economics instructor is to develop each student's ability to (i) identify an *economic question*; (ii) posit a *model* through which a satisfactory answer might be obtained; (iii) *reason* within the model to arrive at an answer; and (iv) use intuition and experience to *reflect* upon the validity of the answer. In other words, I aim to teach students how to *think like an economist*, a skill which not only is valued by prospective employers, but also enriches their understanding of the social world.

My first approach to achieving these goals involves incorporating the diversity of student backgrounds (including, but not limited to, gender, race, and socioeconomic status) directly into the course material. For instance, when I taught Intermediate Microeconomics, I began class by posing a simple, yet fundamental, *economic question*: How does a consumer adjust her consumption of a good when its price increases? I then asked students to identify scenarios in their lives in which the question might be relevant. One student, a working professional who owned a catering company, pointed out that the question was relevant to how he prices his services. Another, a full-time undergraduate student, explained how an increase in on-campus housing prices affected her decision to live off campus. Disparate examples, in turn, motivate the development a unifying *model*. Are there common principles underlying an event planner's choice of caterer and a student's decision where to live? The class is not only primed to learn about the "consumer's

problem", and I have learned something about students' backgrounds, enabling me to tailor my examples to their experiences.

My second approach is to employ structured active in-class learning in order to develop students' abilities to *reason* within a model. To accomplish this, I dedicate class time to problem solving using the "think-pair-share" method: students think about how to solve a problem on their own; discuss their strategies with a partner; and share their group's approach on the board. In addition to developing skills that can be used when attempting out-of-class problem sets on their own, it re-emphasizes that students have much to learn from the diversity of their peers. As evidence of the success of this method, I have noticed that students whom have met one another during my class have gone on to collaborate with the same partners in future classes for which I was a teaching assistant.

My third approach is to explicitly encourage *reflection* through self-directed, yet guided, assignments. In Intermediate Microeconomics, I developed an assignment in which students chose a real-world policy question, conducted a textbook welfare analysis to answer the question, and critiqued the welfare criterion itself. Students responded by highlighting relevant tensions between concepts like equity, fairness, and justice, and economic efficiency, indicative of genuine intellectual engagement with the material. Another way in which I have encouraged self-directed learning is through supervising research. In an undergraduate course on Industrial Organization and in a graduate course in Game Theory, I worked collaboratively with Professor J. Aislinn Bohren to help students (i) formulate feasible and focused research proposals; (ii) construct realistic, yet parsimonious, economic models; and (iii) frame their findings in the context of the existing literature. In addition to fostering critical engagement with the course material, these projects have helped students to develop a sense of identity within the field of economics.

In conclusion, I am dedicated to incorporating students' diverse experiences directly into the curriculum of my classes, developing their logical capabilities through in-class problem solving exercises, and helping them view themselves as members of the field of economics by offering assignments with significant room for self-expression. Students will leave my course not only with concrete analytical skills, but with a richer, more perceptive perspective of the world around them.