

Statement of Teaching Interests and Teaching Philosophy

James Lake

Teaching Interests

My teaching experiences are quite diverse. I have been the Instructor for Econometrics on two occasions and for Elements of Macroeconomics on two occasions. In particular, one of the Econometrics classes was an online class for the Master of Science in Applied Economics program. I have also been a TA for Elements of Microeconomics, International Trade, Elements of Macroeconomics, Game Theory and Money and Banking. In addition, I have tutored undergraduate students in Intermediate Microeconomics, Intermediate Macroeconomics and Mathematical Economics.

Given my research interests, I would be most interested in teaching courses in international trade, microeconomics, game theory and statistics/econometrics. I also have an interest in developing new courses. One is a course on social and economic networks. Recent work has shown the importance of social networks in developing countries. A second course is one oriented towards public policy that focuses on how international trade affects the environment, wages and immigration.

Teaching Philosophy

In the last few years, friends have asked me to explain the tumultuous economic events they see unfolding. Some are PhD philosophers and physicists, others are social activists engaging in Wall St. protests. As a teacher, my objective is that students can explain economic concepts to their friends and colleagues asking similar questions. Explanation requires that students understand the material rather than memorize and regurgitate. This is not an easy task, for teacher or student.

An idea understood provides the crucial ability to draw on intuition in unfamiliar situations. To facilitate an environment that stimulates understanding, I focus on three areas. First, create an engaging atmosphere. Second, be accessible and responsive to students. Third, emphasize the intuition behind formal tools, rather than the tools themselves.

An engaging classroom atmosphere motivates students' desire to understand. I encourage student questions by actively listening to see the student's source of confusion and emphasize "Teachers make mistakes as well sometimes, whether they be typos on the board or misspoken words". To motivate the relationship between theory and practice, I use readings from the contemporary media, ranging from blogosphere debates over the effectiveness of government spending to debates concerning the link between student class size and academic achievement. Unfortunately, larger classes restrict classroom interaction. Here, availability outside scheduled hours shows a respect for students that supports their progress. This availability is one reason I received the departmental Prof. Joel Dean Undergraduate Teaching Award. However, I recognize that some students require even more resources which is why I created a Graduate Student Tutoring program.

Economic reasoning is built upon formal mathematical tools. Exposition via geometry and algebra provide multiple perspectives for students to grasp the workings of economic frameworks. However, the economic intuition underlying these frameworks is of paramount importance. Students need this intuition to successfully apply acquired tools to new situations. As the instructor for Elements of Macroeconomics, I emphasize this intuition in my classroom presentations and give students the opportunity to practice its application. For example, I often ask students to explain newspaper articles. One midterm required explanation of Paul Krugman's reasoning in his NYT opinion column; he argued that higher government spending will reduce the government deficit, given historically low interest rates. Rather than simply drawing the AD-AS and money market

diagrams, a clear explanation required students to grasp the economic intuition underlying the model and use this intuition to piece together the direct and indirect effects of government action.

While engagement, availability, and developing intuition take different forms in an online class, these three principles still guide my teaching. As the instructor for online Econometrics at the Master's level, I emphasize the objective is *ceteris paribus* causal inference using observed data that is not obtained from a *ceteris paribus* environment. Thus, I emphasize the need for an “unrelatedness” assumption between the explanatory variable of interest and any important omitted factors. I find small group discussions in an online discussion forum are effective in helping students understand this assumption. A typical question considers a government run experiment to see whether lower class size increases student test scores. The issue is whether the results have a causal interpretation. Because of the experimental nature of the observed data, students often think the data may reasonably be viewed as obtained in a *ceteris paribus* setting. However, with some guidance, students soon realize that the experiment may alter choices of economic agents. For example, as a child's class size changes, parents may adjust time spent with their child doing homework. Students then see the unrelatedness assumption fails, so causal inference is problematic.

Ultimately, in traditional and online classes, I promote a solid understanding of economic ideas rather than a mechanical ability to memorize and regurgitate economic concepts. This allows students to successfully apply their economic knowledge during their degree and future career. They can also explain these ideas to friends, even those protesting on Wall St.

Teaching Evaluations

James Lake

Instructor

Econometrics (online), Summer 2011

Master of Science in Applied Economics, Johns Hopkins University

| Instructor Evaluation | 5 Strongly Agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 Strongly Disagree | Mean |
|---|------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|------|
| Observed the scheduled class times. | 3 | | | | | 5 |
| Was knowledgeable about course materials. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| Was well prepared for class. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| Taught the course in an organized manner. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| Was interesting and engaging about the course material. | 4 | 1 | 1 | | | 4.5 |
| Provided constructive feedback in a timely manner. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| Was available for students inside or outside of class. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| Encouraged participation in class. | 6 | | | | | 5 |

| Instructor Evaluation | 5 Strongly Agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 Strongly Disagree | Mean |
|--|------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|------|
| The syllabus clearly stated course objectives and assignments. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| The assignments were effective ways to learn the material. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| The intellectual challenge of the course. | 5 | | 1 | | | 4.67 |
| The assignment workload was rigorous. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| The assignments were clearly related to the course objectives. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| The course was taught at the level I expected. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |
| The grading process was fair. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| The grading process was related to the course objectives. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| I learned a great deal from this course. | 6 | | | | | 5 |
| I would recommend this course to other students. | 5 | 1 | | | | 4.83 |

Hard copy summaries of scores and comments available upon request.

Instructor

Elements of Macroeconomics, Summer 2009 and Summer 2010

Economics Department, Johns Hopkins University

| Course Related Questions | 5 Almost always | 4 Usually | 3 Some- times | 2 Infre- quently | 1 Almost never | Mean |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------|
| The text and readings were useful in helping me learn. | 12 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4.17 |
| The course lectures and presentations were useful in helping me learn. | 18 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 4.65 |
| The in-class discussions were useful in helping me learn. | 15 | 6 | 1 | 1 | | 4.52 |
| The outside assignments (homework, papers, reports, and special projects etc.) were useful in helping me learn. | 14 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4.35 |
| Class time was used effectively. | 16 | 2 | 4 | 1 | | 4.43 |
| Feedback from the instructor concerning my work and progress was useful in helping me learn. | 14 | 5 | 3 | 1 | | 4.39 |
| The instructor inspired interest in the subject matter of the course. | 13 | 6 | 3 | | | 4.45 |
| The course was well organized. | 18 | 3 | 2 | | | 4.70 |
| The instructor gave thorough answers to student questions. | 18 | 5 | | | | 4.78 |
| What I was expected to do in this course was clearly stated. | 18 | 4 | | 1 | | 4.70 |
| Individual help was available to me if I needed it. | 20 | 3 | | | | 4.87 |
| The instructor's voice was clear and understandable. | 21 | 2 | | | | 4.91 |
| The instructor seemed genuinely concerned that I learn the material. | 15 | 5 | 2 | | | 4.59 |
| The instructor treated all students with respect. | 23 | 0 | | | | 5 |
| Overall Questions | 5 Almost always | 4 Usually | 3 Some- times | 2 Infre- quently | 1 Almost never | Mean |
| The overall quality of the course. | 13 | 8 | 2 | | | 4.48 |
| The instructor's teaching effectiveness. | 11 | 9 | 3 | | | 4.35 |
| The intellectual challenge of the course. | 11 | 8 | 4 | | | 4.30 |

Teaching Assistant

Elements of Microeconomics, Spring 2010 and Spring 2011

Economics Department, Johns Hopkins University

| Teaching Assistant Questions | 5 Almost always | 4 Usually | 3 Some- times | 2 Infre- quently | 1 Almost never | Mean |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------|
| The teaching/laboratory assistant was effective in helping me learn the material. | 38 | 4 | 1 | 1 | | 4.80 |
| The teaching/laboratory assistant seemed genuinely interested in my progress in the course. | 24 | 17 | 2 | | 1 | 4.43 |
| I understood the relationship between the issues or problems addressed in the discussion or laboratory sessions and the material presented in the lectures. | 36 | 5 | 2 | 1 | | 4.73 |
| The discussions/laboratory sessions were well organized. | 37 | 5 | 2 | 1 | | 4.80 |
| The teaching/laboratory assistant gave thorough answers to student questions. | 37 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | 4.77 |
| The teaching/laboratory assistant's voice was clear and understandable. | 38 | 5 | 1 | | | 4.84 |

For official summaries: <http://www.jhu.edu/merlin/as/Results.html>