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Teaching Statement

"*Mahdi is a very good teacher, smart and humorous, and his passion for economics/math is truly inspirational. I really enjoyed his tutorials, that he somehow made boring math very interesting. Mahdi is also very supportive and understanding. It is a great pleasure to have him as my TA.*"

As a graduate student who is passionate about learning and teaching, my goal as a teacher is fostering passion for economics in my students. I believe this can be achieved through three principles: (1) creating an environment where students feel supported and are treated with respect, (2) active engagement of the students in the classroom, (3) providing opportunities for students to extend their knowledge beyond the boundaries of the class and the course material.

Providing supportive and respectful environment: I believe that a classroom should be a safe and supportive environment for students to learn and express their opinions. At the beginning of every semester I encourage the students to ask questions and express their opinion by quoting Carl Sagan that says "... every question is a cry to understand the world. There is no such thing as a dumb question". I try to remember their names and pronounce it correctly, and address them by their first names. I also make it clear that they can reach me if they are facing extenuating circumstances that affect their performance and try to help them to succeed in the course. When they ask a question I try to answer the question patiently, acknowledge the importance of the question, and its relevance to the course material. I have learned that nothing promotes diversity and inclusion more than involving the students and respecting their participation in the class.

Active engagement: As a graduate student I have been privileged to be a teaching assistant for a variety of courses, from graduate level microeconomics, econometrics theory and computational economics, to undergraduate and honour level macroeconomics, microeconomics and empirical research. Keeping students engaged and active in a class is a daunting task specially in advanced classes. After several years of teaching I have learned that two of the main reasons for students' lack of engagement are fear of the material (such as programming) and the abstract nature of some the topics in economics. For courses that require coding I try to be up-to-date on modern platforms for programming that makes the coding experience easy and enjoyable for students such as Google Colab which is cloud based platform for running Python, Julia and R. This platform is really easy to work with because it does not require local installation on a computer and can be shared with students as a link. For courses that have advanced mathematical topics I try to start with a simple motivating example and justify the use of these abstract concepts. When possible, I try to make the concept tangible through visualization methods such as images and videos. Some of these visualizations can be found on my website under the Blog Posts.[1] Also I found that appropriate humor be very effective in bringing the students' attention back to the topic and keeping them engaged.

Extension of knowledge beyond the class and the course material: my personal experience, as a student and a teacher, has taught me that self-study and self-directed learning is the most crucial aspect of the learning process. In my tutorials I always try to provide news articles and books that apply the concepts covered in the class to real world scenarios. When a student ask an interesting question that is beyond the scope of the course I make sure that I provide them with a more advanced textbook or scientific article to encourage them toward an independent and self-directed learning. I also encourage them to attend the office hours for more in-depth follow up discussion. For instance, in Econ 307 (Honours Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis I) I had two students that showed interest in dynamic programming in macroeconomics. I introduced Recursive Macroeconomic Theory textbook to them and frequently helped them with their self-directed studies. One of those students is now a PhD student at UBC and works with me on two projects, one as a research assistant and one as a future co-author.

[1] Some of these visualizations can be found at https://sites.google.com/site/mahdiebrahimikahou/blog-posts

Future plans for teaching: I would like to design and teach a course at the intersection of modern machine learning and economics. This course offers an introduction to machine learning methods, the theory behind these methods, hands-on coding experience with economics data, and an introduction to causal inference in machine learning. I would also like to teach a course in computational methods for economists. This course offers an introduction to topics such as auto-differentiation, numerical optimization, and Monte Carlo methods. The course provides a "learning by doing" approach by applying these methods to problems in macroeconomics, microeconomics, and econometrics. Because of my research background I can teach macroeconomics and econometrics. I also really enjoy teaching microeconomics.

Below I provide a list of the courses I have been a teaching assistant for and some of the comments I have received in my teaching evaluations.

Course Number	Course Name	Level	Evaluation
Econ 626	Econometrics Theory	PhD	4.17/5
Econ 622	Computational Economics with Data Science Applications	PhD	4.48/5
Econ 514	Information and incentives	Masters	4.5/5
Econ 326	Methods of Empirical Research in Economics	Undergrad	4.34/5
Econ 307	Honours Intermediate Macroeconomics II	Undergrad	5/5
Econ 306	Honours Intermediate Microeconomics II	Undergrad	5/5
Econ 305	Honours Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis I	Undergrad	4.62/5
Econ 102	Principles of Macroeconomics	Undergrad	4.5/5

Comments:

"Mahdi was an extremely helpful, insightful and overall an amazing Teaching assistant. He made an extremely positive contribution to the course. His patience in leading the labs, in addition to his clear and concise explanations was a lifesaver in this course. Additionally, Mahdi's kindness, patience and knowledge was extremely helpful. I attended his office hours after the labs on multiple occasions, and not only was he not judgmental when I did not know basic concepts, his explanations were often more clear than the professors. He took time out of his day to help me through this course, and I could not be more grateful. The knowledge he passed onto me will be some of the few things I will actually take away from this course."

"Mahdi is one of the best TAs I have had the privilege of working with over my entire time at UBC. ... He has inspired me to work towards TAing Econ courses myself in the future."

"Mahdi was an excellent TA. He was very interactive and engaging. He made time to help me when it was convenient for me. He helped me learn the class material, but also assisted on related work that was not part of his explicit duties. Overall, he went above and beyond and has been the best TA I've had at UBC because of his mastery of the material and ability to engage and interact in ways that make the material interesting."

"Mahdi was an amazing TA to have. Each week, he led workshops in a consistent format – going over that weeks chapters practice questions. Not only did he explain each question and answer with great detail and reasoning, but he also explained many interesting economics in the news situations of what we were learning. I am very fortunate to have attended his weekly workshops as they helped me gain a better understanding for much of the course content."

"Let this man be a prof already."