HARVARD UNIVERSITY

SAMANTHA BURN, PHD
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Teaching Statement

I enjoy teaching and mentoring students in health economics and policy, microeconomics, and applied econometrics.

Teaching Experience

I served as head teaching fellow for two courses at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government: a Ph.D.-level course in microeconomic theory (taught by Professor Christopher Avery) and a master's course in health economics and policy (taught by Professor Joseph Newhouse). I have experience in teaching core economics topics, for example, game theory, moral hazard, and adverse selection; applied health policy topics, for example, comparative health care systems, and the relationship between income and health; and applied econometrics, for example, quasi-experimental methods like differences-in-differences. I have taught master's students (MBA, MPP, MPA, and MPH), Ph.D. students, and advanced undergraduates.

In my teaching roles, I collaborated with the professors to develop lecture material, assignments, and exams. I designed and ran weekly discussion sections to review and extend the lecture material. I also developed new teaching material, for example, adding a section on dynamic programming to the introductory microeconomics course I taught. I received the Derek Bok *Certificate of Excellence and Distinction in Teaching* award twice, awarded to teaching fellows with especially high scores in end-of-semester evaluations. At Harvard, as well as teaching formal courses, I volunteered as a teacher for local middle and high school students on community outreach days at the Chan School of Public Health.

Teaching Philosophy

My role as a teacher is to communicate core concepts in a way that is accessible to all students, and to help students apply course material to the kinds of problems they will face in their subsequent work.

Much of my experience has involved teaching technical mathematics and economics concepts to students with highly varying academic backgrounds. This presents two related challenges: ensuring all students can engage with the material while also recognizing that students have different objectives in taking the course. I approach these challenges by building up the material in stages. I start by explaining fundamental concepts clearly and concisely, using intuition where possible. I then present material in multiple different ways, using diagrams and working through examples, as well as formal proofs. Finally, I provide jumping-off points for future learning and research. This includes providing additional content on core concepts for students grappling with the material as well as outlining open areas of research for students keen to work in the area.

I aim to foster an inclusive and respectful classroom environment where every student is comfortable participating, both asking and answering questions. One barrier to participation is fear of being wrong, so I try to normalize making mistakes and learning from them, for example by showing a common mistake while working through a problem, and then asking students where the mistake is and how they would go about correcting it. I have found that presenting the core material in several different ways is a simple but effective way to accommodate neurodiversity as well as making the course more inclusive for students with learning disabilities.

I enjoy designing assignments that harness students' existing interests and expertise as well as enabling them to actively engage with the material. For example, when teaching health policy, I

180A Longwood Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02115 | 202-817-7454
burn@hcp.med.harvard.edu

facilitated mock "congressional testimonies". Students choose a topic they are passionate about and testify to a "congressional committee" made up of their peers. For more technical courses, in addition to the standard math problem sets I like to assign more open-ended questions, for example prompting students to critique or extend an existing model, or even to write a model of their own related to their research.

I constantly iterate on my teaching style and course materials, using real-time feedback from my own experience as well as published evidence. For example, I set low-stakes assignments and assessments early in the course, so I can quickly identify whether my teaching is effective and flag students' individual needs. Research shows that students from under-represented groups are less likely to request extensions, so I try to set class policies that build in flexibility for students whilst also promoting equity e.g., by allowing several "late days" over the semester. I am also eager to experiment with using technology to make my teaching more effective and inclusive, for example using the "Teachly" app developed at Harvard to track class participation.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Teaching
Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) through my teaching is extremely important to me. When teaching health policy, this involves designing course content that centers health equity and grapples with racism and other structural disadvantages. I am dedicated to promoting diverse perspectives in my teaching materials and syllabi and try to incorporate voices and scholarship from a wide range of backgrounds, including authors who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and scholars from low- and middle-income countries. I aim to foster an inclusive classroom that respects the diversity and individuality of my students, as described above. I am experienced with teaching students with disabilities and working with them and the relevant university office to provide the accommodations required to help them access the course. As with all aspects of my teaching, I am committed to learning more about how best to advance DEI. More on my efforts in this area can be found in my DEI statement.

Example Comments from Teaching Evaluations
Below are some comments from past teaching evaluations at Harvard:

- **"**She was an absolutely wonderful teacher, extremely nice person, very generously available over email. I feel extremely lucky to have learned from her and I don't know what we would've done without her."
- "Sam was an excellent TF [Teaching Fellow] for this course. Her sections were incredibly helpful in developing a better understanding of the materials covered in class. She is thoughtful and professional."
- "Thoughtful, brilliant, and committed to helping students. She is fantastic!"
- "Sam was an incredible TF - her step-by-step guidance on problems during office hours and section were absolutely pivotal for my understanding of the material. Whether in class or via email, it was clear she was going well beyond her requirements."