Teaching Statement | Alexander Haas

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I find teaching to be a very rewarding activity and a cornerstone of academic life. It is not only a fundamental duty of the academic profession but also a great source of inspiration for my own research. Since 2019, I have been lucky to teach both undergraduate and graduate students at the Master and PhD level at the University of Oxford. Prior to that, I have already had the chance to teach undergraduate students during my own undergraduate studies in Germany.

Teaching Experience

I have taught undergraduate students at Oxford in **Preliminary Macroeconomics** (1st year), **Core Macroeconomics** (2nd year), **Probability and Statistics** (1st year), and **Maths** (1st year) from 2020 to 2022. Undergraduate teaching at Oxford is typically run by Colleges and conducted in small tutorial groups with a mixture of assigned analytical questions and essays that are marked and discussed during tutorials. The preliminary and core macroeconomics courses cover topics in growth, labor markets, and business cycle dynamics (using the IS/LM and AS/AD frameworks in year 1; and simplified dynamic IS-NKPC and RBC models in year 2). Further aspects include the open economy, fiscal and monetary policy (at the zero lower bound), and frictional financial intermediation. Sample syllabi can be found here and here. The first-year courses in probability and statistics and maths aim to give students the necessary quantitative tools for their second- and third-year courses. This includes a review of elementary concepts in algebra and analysis, (partial) differentiation, (constrained) optimisation, and integration as well as probability, statistical inference, times series, and causal inference. Sample syllabi can be found here and here. In 2021, I was also appointed **Director of Studies** at Trinity College (replacing Prof. Andrea Ferrero as the economics fellow for the duration of his academic leave), with administrative duties and in charge of admissions including pre-selection and interviews. An evaluation of my undergraduate teaching can be found here.

From 2019 to 2022, I have further taught graduate students in economics (MPhil and DPhil) in **1st-Year Graduate Macroeconomics**. This year-long course is comparable to a first-year course in a U.S. PhD program and covers topics from dynamic programming, complete and incomplete market models, growth, and labor to monetary economics and macro-finance. Students work on weekly assignments that are marked and discussed in class by graduate teaching assistants. In my first year, I taught one biweekly class for the entire academic year covering every topic, receiving a **departmental graduate teaching award**.[1] In the following two years, I taught multiple weekly classes in the monetary economics segment of the course. A sample syllabus of this segment and an informal overview in my own notes (prepared as a weekly recap of the material for students at the beginning of class) can be found here and here. Detailed student feedback on my graduate teaching can be found here and here.[2]

Finally, given good results in my first-year exams, I have had the opportunity to develop an interest in teaching early on in my studies as a teaching assistant for first-year undergraduate courses in **Maths** and **Intermediate Microeconomics** at the University of Tübingen. From my second year on, I taught these courses, in three instances, covering principles of linear algebra and real analysis as well as household and firm optimization, price theory, and competition.

[1] The Department of Economics did not award this prize in subsequent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
[2] There is no formal evaluation of graduate teaching assistants but student feedback is collected once per year.

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy centers on my role as an educator with a primary objective of intellectually challenging and empowering students to apply their acquired knowledge beyond the classroom. With undergraduate students, my aim is to motivate and inspire reflective, critical thinking and an early discerning contact with original research. For graduate students, I strive to equip them with the essential tools for conducting independent research, all the while introducing them to ideas and research at the forefront of the field. To accomplish this, I aim for my teaching to follow three guiding principles: to be inclusive, interactive, and adaptable.

My primary aim in teaching is to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment where every student feels empowered to engage and contribute. I achieve this through various strategies, such as initiating informal conversations at the beginning of class, providing short recaps on previous material, and occasional motivational inputs reflecting on the challenges of a competitive undergraduate or graduate program. I generally find, that these introductions resonate with students and set a positive and motivating tone. In addition, I always aim to arrive 10 minutes early for class, making myself available for one-on-one interactions with students who may not yet be comfortable speaking up in a group setting. Drop-in surgeries and regular office hours also help in this respect and I encourage students to make good use of them.

Second, I believe learning success is tightly linked with active participation in class. This is possible in an environment in which students feel comfortable to contribute and speak up. Classes are short and the time spent together should be used in the most efficient way. In my experience, this is typically not by writing out lengthy solutions to difficult questions while students copy them. Instead, I prefer to share material in advance, spending the class going over the more difficult material, filling in the gaps, and discussing extensions and alternative methods. This approach keeps the class interesting and interactive, benefits students that are struggling as more time is spent on difficult sections, and challenges more advanced students with time for discussions and extensions. It also allows me to easily adapt the content of a class.

Having taught students with diverse backgrounds from all over the world, I frequently have had to adapt how I explain a given concept to different students. A wide range of prior quantitative training is often a key challenge that comes with this. To make sure everyone can follow, I often try to present the same material in different ways within a given class, combining a narrative explanation with a formal, and a graphical approach. More generally, I find it helpful to always contextualize new material and link formal sections on derivations and new methods with real world examples and applications. For example, when first introducing and deriving the 3-equation new-Keynesian model, I would put key assumptions into historical context, highlight the main divergences from a non-frictional real business cycle model, and anticipate first policy implications. I find these excourses can be short and easily implemented in an otherwise highly methodological class, providing a welcome breathing space for students.

Future Teaching

I would be excited to continue teaching courses in macroeconomics at all levels, including foundational courses and advanced courses at the research frontier. I would also be excited to design my own curriculum, particularly on topics in monetary economics and macro-finance. I would further be happy to teach segments in neighboring fields, such as international economics and finance. At an undergraduate level, I would be able to teach courses in all fields.