

# Connor Cole

University of Michigan  
Department of Economics  
611 Tappan Ave  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

+1 (907) 750-5434  
colecpc@umich.edu  
<https://cole-cp.github.io/>

## Teaching Statement

### Section I: Core Teaching Principles

Teaching economics in graduate school has been a fulfilling and enriching experience. It has helped me see new connections in economics, it has sharpened my ability to communicate ideas to others and it has opened up questions that have inspired me in my research. In addition to the lessons I have learned from teaching, it has also been deeply inspiring to see my students grow and succeed. For the past four years, I have used grants and fellowships to cover my expenses so I could focus on my job market paper and conduct research with my adviser. I look forward to returning to the classroom with the insights I have gained from my research, as I view teaching as just as much of a calling for me as academic research.

I believe that my skill at teaching is amply demonstrated in my attached teaching evaluation summary. As is clear, my students routinely have rated my courses and my teaching ability highly, with the most recent course I taught having a median 4.71 response out of 5 on the statement "the instructor was an excellent teacher."

As a teacher, I have five core principles that I bring to my work: embodying enthusiasm for learning, creating individually-tailored course materials, encouraging interactive teaching in the classroom, demonstrating relevance of class material, and above all valuing my students.

#### 1) Embodying Enthusiasm for Learning

The most inspiring teachers I had as an undergraduate were teachers who approached their work at the front of the class with obvious passion and conviction. They offered a level of enthusiasm at the board that motivated students to reflect that energy back in their coursework. I have endeavored to offer the same gift to my students. Part of teaching is a performance, and I have learned how to embrace that feature of my work while maintaining rigorous academic standards. I take pride in the fact that I have often been told that my passion for this work is infectious, that I routinely had students stay after class for questions, and that my office hours were often overflowing, sometimes with students from other classes. I would bring the same passion and love of learning to my teaching moving forward.

#### 2) Creating Individually-Tailored Course Materials

Any course bears the unique imprint of the person who teaches it. I believe it is important to make class materials that clearly communicate to students the information a teacher wants them to learn in a course. As such, I have always made my own detailed teaching materials for students in my sections. This work ensures that I know specifically how the material is communicated to my students. When I was a graduate student instructor for an intermediate econometrics course, for example, I made a semester-long course on STATA. I made my own in-class materials, class notes, and homework, and I then passed along all my work to the next graduate student instructor who taught the course after me. I made the materials for that unit public [here](#).

Making these materials can be time-consuming, but it demonstrates seriousness to the students about the teacher's investment. It also makes sure that students have access to materials that reflect the teacher's own expectations and goals for the course.

### **3) Encouraging Interactive Teaching**

Interacting with students is one of the joys of teaching, and also a productive teaching strategy for keeping students engaged. I interact with my students in class in many ways. First, I actively encourage students to ask questions in class. If one student has a question, it is likely the case that others do as well. I have consistently gotten positive feedback from students on my willingness to take questions. Second, I like to allow students their own room for problem solving in the space of a lecture. My first statistics course was with a professor who had the habit of doing examples on the board, and then stopping at a critical point in the example and asking the students to finish it on their own. He would allow time, and then go on and complete the problem himself. In my teaching, I have always sought out ways to incorporate this form of student engagement, because it allows time for the class to breathe, allows students to see what parts of a problem they do not understand yet, and it prevents students from slipping into a passive role in class. It makes sure they are actively engaged in following along examples and working through them on their own. In the STATA course I taught for example, I strategically chose examples where I asked students to complete the next steps, before then solving the next steps myself.

Most of my previous teaching experience comes from teaching relatively small sections of 20 to 40 students. If I were working with a larger lecture class of 100 or more students, I would continue to use the individual problem solving strategy I described. I would also use iClickers or other related technology to enable more students to participate in the course.

### **4) Demonstrating Relevance of Class Material**

As my background was in public policy before I entered economics, I am often looking for real world applications of concepts and ideas to motivate my teaching. When I taught undergraduate microeconomics, for example, I connected our discussions of budget sets to transfer policy design, and connected our discussion of the theory of monopoly to cable providers. When I taught econometrics, I tied our discussion of omitted variable bias with education variables in Mincer equations to a discussion of research on the causal effect of schooling. When I taught macroeconomics, I had students talk about the austerity debate during the Great Recession and how our models in class could both argue for and against the claims politicians made.

I think these kinds of applications help students see the link between material in a course and real world questions they might have outside of the classroom. For many students, these links are exactly the reasons why they choose to study economics in the first place. These applications also encourage students to more creatively analyze questions the way economists do.

### **5) Valuing Students**

Lastly, one of my most important teaching principles is that I value my students. When I teach a class, I want to do my best to ensure that every student can be successful in the course. I want to set-up an environment where they feel challenged and engaged in the course, but also one where they believe they can succeed.

An important part of creating an environment where students believe they can succeed is knowing that some students may need more attention and encouragement than others. Undergraduate students come to higher education from many different backgrounds, and for some the transition is rockier than others. Non-white students, students from low-income families, and students who are the first in their family to go into higher education, in particular, often have the most difficult transition. As such, I always proactively identify students who seem to be having trouble in class and send them encouraging and friendly invitations to attend

my office hours and work on problems with me in person.

I view the positive reports on my teaching evaluations as an indication I have been successful in encouraging this environment for student learning. Moving forward, of course, I intend to keep working to improve my teaching skills, but I believe I am ready to start off next year as an excellent addition to the teaching faculty.

## **Section II: Specific Courses I Can Teach**

### **Introductory Undergraduate Courses**

I have not taught first year courses in economics. However, I do have extensive experience as a mathematics and economics tutor, so I am well-acquainted with the material in these courses. I would be able to teach introductory courses in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics.

### **Intermediate/Advanced Undergraduate Courses**

I have taught all the main intermediate courses that undergraduates take. I have taught intermediate microeconomics, intermediate macroeconomics, and intermediate econometrics. I would be able to teach all of these courses. I would also be able to develop advanced special topics courses for undergraduates on any of the fields I mention below for graduate courses.

### **Graduate Courses**

I have not taught graduate courses yet. However, I have presented my work extensively at seminars, and am experienced at describing research to graduate students and faculty. My specialties are in labor economics, public economics, demography, program evaluation and applied econometrics. I would be able to teach any of these courses at the graduate level.