

Teaching statement

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Dreams of changing the world are conceived early in life, but too often abandoned as the means remain unclear to most. Having experienced the transformative power of education is a privilege that has shaped my vision. At the same time it has empowered me to make a contribution to society through my research, which itself is aimed at understanding what motivates the individual to make decisions that bring about the collective good.

The broad goals of an Economics teacher are that students value the subject, become confident in their ability to solve economic problems and communicate, and can reason like an economist. Yet my experience in research and academia has shown me something more profound: that when individuals are faced to a different approach to a problem and understand the different actors and perspectives involved, the learning acts at a deeper level that modifies their behavior in and out of the classroom.

Like my dreams, my love for teaching came about early in life. For years I tutored my siblings from primary school to their undergrad studies. Being the elder, a review of a given lesson in math or social sciences readily became an implicit lesson in human values. I was aware that beyond the formal lesson there was an individual in formation, and one whom I cared deeply for.

Already in high school I used to have great esteem for my teachers, as I acknowledged that their lives and efforts were dedicated to bring about understanding, and moreover to kindle a pleasure for learning in their students and improve their future. I became part of the mentoring team which tutored classmates who were in trouble. That interest in tutoring carried on to my undergraduate studies at the University of Los Andes. As a student assistant for several Economics courses, I tutored groups of 20-40 students, mentored them for class projects and solved and graded homework. My professors, as well as my students, taught me how to provide clear, organized presentations and made me improve the quality of my class notes.

During my MSc at the same university I discovered that relevant teaching is supported by cutting-edge research, and found that my place was in the academia. I complemented my graduate studies with teaching assistantships in introductory Economics courses. The courses (groups of 25-40 people) were aimed at students in engineering and social sciences. I learned to discuss economic concepts with students from different backgrounds. Having assisted Prof. Juan-Camilo Cárdenas was a privilege thanks to which I found out what active learning really means. I contributed to his course design and taught a section of 30 Econ graduate students in Experimental Economics, which was to preparing the students to conduct autonomous research. From this experience I learned to prepare real-world examples based on practical problems and current events. I enjoyed applying the knowledge to the real world and draw connections to everyday life.

I taught Microeconomics and Experimental Economics again during my doctoral studies at UCL. I learned teaching students from different nationalities, English being a foreign language both to me and to most of them. In addition to classroom teaching, my role as a Teaching Assistant included tutoring students during office hours, grading problem sets and exams, developing practice problems, preparing section notes and organizing review sessions.

I have realized that as a teacher I must be a good student too: always willing to learn, pay attention to outcomes, feedback and others' styles and continually develop my teaching practice. This has led

to a student-centric approach, both in the design and the delivery of the course materials. This approach does not imply 'spoon-feeding' the students, or teaching to the test, rather it is a rigorous one to structuring a course with i) clarity and organization, ii) engagement in and outside of the classroom, iii) a genuine, shared interest in the students' success and iv) a vision of community in which we all are learning what we'll do in our careers and will have an impact in other's lives. My course evaluations (available upon request) show that my approach was appreciated by students. I have had the pleasure of meeting former students who remember my course positively and are doing research now.

I have strived to develop in my students a sense of shared interest in academic and professional success. Being as supportive as possible makes them both more receptive to my teaching as they are encouraged to invest in themselves. Through my efforts to know my students, be perceptive, be humble and open to learn from them, a two-way approach has come about. This approach is powerful, as I found in my research on how incentives crowd-in non-economic motives: what matters is the meaning of the incentive to the target of the incentives; this depends on the social relationships among the actors, the information the incentive provides, and the preexisting normative frameworks of the actors. Seeing my students learn, and sharing in this joint success, has without a doubt been a rewarding experience.

I strive to combine my two-way approach with an inclusive learning environment. To address diverse learning styles, I depict concepts and relationships graphically wherever possible, and often times using innovative tools such as economic experiments, role games, technology-based and participatory tools, which I have found to be very effective for the non-econ students to learn concepts such as decreasing marginal productivity or price discrimination. I believe that when individuals become involved and engaged in the teaching process, they learn better. This is again consistent with my research, where I find that disclosure of results to the participants is key to actually improve collective action: promoting prosocial behavior by teaching the community about the advantages of overcoming social dilemmas and coordination among members is part of my research agenda.

Last spring I designed and taught a course on Behavioral and Experimental Economics for Social Interventions and Policy Evaluation for an NGO, Corpovisionarios, a think-tank on civic education in Latin America. I had to convey the real world relevance of economics research and to make specialized methods accessible to this particular audience. The course was a great success, to the extent that watching the videotaped lectures will become a requirement for new employees. With that opportunity I found the positive influence of presenting and analyzing economic problems with an interdisciplinary perspective.

I believe education shapes the vision and empowers the individual. If a dream of a better world is possible, that comes about by multiplying the vision and empowering others to make their contribution. It comes about by teaching. I have come to see this throughout my research, and have been delighted to confirm it over my teaching experience.

With my educational and research background, I am well equipped to teach I am well equipped to teach any level Microeconomics course, Game theory, Experimental economics, Microeconometrics and Impact Evaluation. I would also be happy to teach Economic networks and Behavioral or Development Microeconomics. I am equally interested in teaching undergraduate, graduate and professional students. Teaching has been a rewarding experience and I look forward to doing it for the rest of my life.