# Teaching Statement (draft)

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In this essay, I present a summary of my views and thoughts about teaching.

## 1 Background

In my social circle, people typically think that good grades are a sign of teaching ability. I frequently helped classmates, my younger brother's friends, and family members with subjects they found challenging.

While academic success does not always translate into good teaching, in my case, it seemed to work. I remember one instance when a friend of my brother needed to prepare for a comprehensive eighth-grade math exam. We went from no knowledge to him mastering the material within just a month. He is now a college graduate.

After college, my first job was as a lecturer at the University of Costa Rica, teaching Introduction to Economics for three semesters. That experience remains one of the happiest periods of my life, with lively class discussions, meaningful student engagement, and supportive colleagues— important inputs in my decision to pursue a PhD.

At UCSD, I have served as an instructional assistant for 15 quarters. Most were in microeconomics or behavioral/experimental economics classes, but also econometrics and even a conservation economics course I particularly enjoyed.

I have also been the primary instructor for two summer courses: Econ 100B, a core upper-division course, and Econ 171, an elective on decisions under uncertainty. Econ 100B was intense, with a large amount of material condensed into four weeks. Econ 171 allowed me to teach the foundations of my own research.

Looking ahead, I would be open to teaching any econ/business classes. I am particularly excited about microeconomics (theory and applied), behavioral and experimental, business, and mathematics for economists.

## 2 Why I Teach

Teaching is the bridge between discovery and understanding. It brings knowledge to life, often sparking questions that feed back into research and applications.

It also allows me to share topics I am passionate about with students eager to learn, while challenging them intellectually. Teaching also shapes worldviews and opens doors to possibilities students may not have imagined.

Finally, teaching is a service to society. The quality of a democracy depends on an educated citizenry, and higher education is key in the formation of future leaders, professionals, and policymakers.

## 3 What I consider the four big pillars of teaching

**1. Effective knowledge transmission.** The core of teaching is helping students understand and retain knowledge. I integrate active learning into every class, including in-class practice problems, peer discussions, collective problem-solving, and mini case studies where students take the perspective of policymakers or business managers. These activities reinforce concepts from the lecture and keep students engaged, allowing them to process material before moving to the next topic.

Economics differs from highly technical fields like geology or quantum physics: it is about real-life decisions. A successful lecture should direct students to visualize concepts and ideas as naturally as they would a story, making abstract models feel like natural, coherent narratives. I start with the basic intuition behind a concept before introducing technical details, using stories and examples to bridge the gap between theory and application. By translating economic jargon and formal notation into relatable narratives, students can internalize both the "why" and the "how" of economic ideas.

**2. Focus on practical relevance.** Most students are not aiming for a PhD and may not be primarily interested in research. They are most engaged when they can relate the material to their own lives or imagine applying it in the near or distant future. I think of this as the "practical value" of what they are learning.

Generating a sense of practical relevance is easier in some classes than others. In a course on portfolio management, the applications are obvious; in a class on measure theory, it requires more effort. I believe it is a crucial part of lecture design to connect abstract concepts to examples students can relate to.

For instance, in Econ171, after covering the theory of demand and supply of insurance, I illustrated the concepts using real insurance contracts, including student health insurance.

**3. Empathy**. Being a student is often difficult. You are constantly tested, exposed to challenging material, and at the same time, navigating the pressures of life outside the classroom. Learning becomes far more meaningful when the instructor recognizes these struggles and responds with empathy. This does not mean lowering standards or compromising rigor. Rather, it means demanding excellence while also being mindful of students' challenges and remembering that a single kind word can make a profound difference.

I received this impactful comment in the last reflection assignment for Econ 100B:

*"I think the most important thing I've learned is confidence. When you mentioned in the last lecture that someone had said they hated econ during the first class, that was me. I've been lurking here because I always got very poor grades in previous economics classes. This left me feeling very confused and lacking confidence. But you provided me with confidence. Your thorough explanations made it very easy for me to understand the content you taught. This made me think, perhaps the previous professors didn't teach as well as you do? But it doesn't matter anymore. I believe that's the case. Thank you for making me realize that I am not a poor student!"*

I don't think this was a reflection of an "easy" class, but the voice of a student who felt heard, supported. This highlights the profound emotional impact an instructor can have on a student's confidence and life.

**4. Joy**. Teaching is performative. Like a musician or an actor, a teacher develops a presence in the classroom. Each lecture is an opportunity to keep students engaged, entertained, and intellectually stimulated. I call this value **joy** because, much like performers who seem to be having the time of their lives on stage, teachers should radiate enthusiasm for their subject. As evaluations show, students often emphasize a positive and entertaining attitude in my lectures.

While delivery is not everything, the classes I enjoyed most as a college student were those where the professor taught as if it were the most exciting job in the world, and this went from proof-based calculus to the history of economic thought. That sense of joy is contagious.

# 4 Assessments

Exams are an important evaluation tool, but should not dominate course grades. Assigning more than 75% of the grade to exams risks penalizing capable students who are less skilled at test-taking. Exams measure a specific type of performance; grades should reflect broader engagement with material.

I design exams using Bloom's taxonomy, incorporating conceptual multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions, short-answer questions requiring qualitative reasoning, and quantitative problem-solving. This approach balances cognitive levels and helps me gauge whether students grasp underlying ideas, not just problem-solving techniques.

Students benefit from alternative ways to demonstrate learning, such as presentations, projects, and reflections. Low-stakes formative assessments—quizzes, homework, etc.—prepare students for summative evaluations while reducing anxiety.

I particularly like reflections because they encourage students to interact in ways they normally would not in a lecture or an exam. In Econ 100B, I asked students to "find a topic you like and think how class material could help answer a question." One student identified the lack of competitive teams in the Mexican women's soccer league as a topic that could be studied through producer theory and cost analysis. This is a specific example of a student effectively connecting abstract class concepts to real-life matters.

# 5 Research and Teaching

As I mentioned earlier, teaching and research are deeply interconnected. Staying active in research keeps instructors current, aware of emerging debates and attuned to challenged ideas in the field, which enriches teaching. Moreover, sharing your own research and that of leading scholars exposes students to cutting-edge ideas, inspiring curiosity and deeper engagement with the discipline.

# 6 Perceived Challenges: Teaching in 2025

In Econ171 this summer, I intentionally avoided incentivizing course evaluations, requesting students to complete them at their convenience. I emphasized the importance of evaluations for both myself and the student community and encouraged honest feedback. The result? Only 2 out of 13 students completed it, insufficient to generate a report.

This experience highlights a broader concern: many students do not fully view college as a learning experience. Classes are often seen primarily as a means to earn credits and, ultimately, a degree that signals employability, rather than as an opportunity for intellectual growth.

The rise of AI further complicates this. As information and problem-solving tools become widely accessible, the signaling value of a degree alone is declining. Higher education remains critical for developing true skills and critical thinking, but only if students, teachers, and universities engage thoughtfully. Reframing higher education as inherently valuable, not merely a credential, is essential to preserving its purpose and impact.