

Teaching Statement

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I believe all students are capable of learning and enjoying any topic if they are motivated and excited to learn. My goal as a teacher is to be able to find my passion for the material and transfer this passion to students by using practical examples, being flexible in method and material, and prioritizing group discussion.

In my experience as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate class at UW Madison on commodity markets, I had an opportunity to teach a topic that was completely new to me. As I began to learn and enjoy the topic, I prepared materials for the discussion sections to help students follow my learning process. I presented case studies on the Netherlands' tulip boom and the Hunt brothers' silver manipulation. I found the material was more engaging to the students when I found my own passion for the material and could use practical examples to show the importance of the topic.

I have also found it important in the classroom to be able to adjust material and teaching methods quickly to accommodate the backgrounds of different students. I have twice taught groups of adults who had very diverse backgrounds and found that I often had to adjust material midway through courses to better utilize class time. For example, when I taught a two-day seminar on small ruminant husbandry in Southern Sierra Leone, I learned quickly that the planned topics on fencing had less application in their particular economic environment, and adjusted material mid-seminar to focus on more cost-effective fencing strategies. In my ESL class I taught at the Dominico American Society of Queens, I was responsible for designing an ESL curriculum for a class of about 10 adults. As I was designing the lessons, I would take the day after each class to review student progress from the previous lecture to guide what I should focus on the next day.

Another important tenet of my philosophy is group discussion. I believe this helps student learning because it gives ownership of the learning process to students. In Sierra Leone, I followed every morning of instruction with a hands-on activity for handling sheep and a village-level discussion of the best ways to implement those practices with their current sheep flock. This allowed the participants to build knowledge together rather than simply ingesting my lecture, and taught me about what topics needed to be addressed most. These group discussions have been effective in my teaching because they allow students to learn from each other, build group cohesion, take ownership of the learning process, and give valuable feedback to the instructor.

I look forward to mentoring students. I have benefitted immensely in my career from mentoring from both graduate students and faculty and have found it vital to my development as a scholar. In Sierra Leone, I worked with several undergraduate students from Njala University from the animal science department who were recruited to assist me in the class activities and instruction. During my ten days at Njala University, I saw how giving those students roles in the instruction improved the instruction and inspired them to be more active in their own communities in Sierra Leone. I found this to be one of the most rewarding parts of the experience. I especially find it rewarding when the end goal is to make students skilled and independent scholars.

I find teaching any course to be a valuable opportunity to grow and learn. I feel I can teach in almost any area of applied economics if I have sufficient time to prepare. I am happy to teach any undergraduate course in agricultural economics or microeconomics, as well as most applied topics at the graduate level. I have recently helped develop materials for a class on data analytics using Python and cloud computing, tools I use extensively in my own research, and I am comfortable teaching applied data science and machine learning for economics research at any level.