Teaching Statement

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Teaching Philosophy

My primary goal in teaching is to create the conditions for all students to engage deeply with the course content in ways that support the development of new modes of thinking. I practiced this as the instructor of record for a large survey course in development economics (taught in spring 2020 entirely online for the first time due to COVID-19), and as the teaching assistant for an upper division course in program evaluation and for an interdisciplinary MS course on the economics of small scale agriculture. Students learn content better if they can conceptualize how it fits together: a system of knowledge is easier to work with than a series of disconnected facts. Economic modes of thinking have immense power to help students understand the social world around them and the role of policy in it. My pedagogical experiences at UC Davis have allowed me to apply and refine my teaching philosophy: by engaging deeply with students as people and with the material, students learn new mental models as they grapple with the content.

When I am teaching, I aim to create a structure of understanding with students. This involves careful course organization and syllabus design guided by explicit learning objectives. In planning lectures, I include information to contextualize the core material so that students can relate it to what they know. For students to truly engage with the material, however, we must do more than lecture. I design coursework to support students in achieving specific course objectives in a structured way. Assignments provide necessary scaffolding for students to learn how to apply economic modes of thinking and practice analytic skills, while building confidence. Assignments serve both to help students learn and to assess their progress, so I ask students to explain their reasoning and justify their thought process. Students therefore learn by doing and come away more confident in their analytic abilities, as well as developing metacognitive skills that support lifelong learning. For the advanced undergraduate course on the economics of global poverty, I wrote problem sets that asked students to perform their own quantitative analysis using techniques taught in class on real datasets, and then to interpret these findings in policy-relevant ways.

When UC Davis courses moved fully online last spring due to COVID, I had to adapt the Microeconomics for Development course I was teaching. While daunting, it also presented an opportunity to create and test materials that kept students engaged in the most adverse settings. Throughout my teaching, I demonstrate how the (sometimes abstract) concepts in the curriculum apply to the broader world and encourage curiosity about how students can use these ways of thinking themselves. I provided weekly supplemental readings from accessible media sources (e.g., *The Economist*) on current events that demonstrated course-relevant topics. Students loved seeing how the economic concepts they were learning about were linked to key issues of the day, such as covariate shocks and risk-management strategies in the context of a global pandemic. I challenged my undergraduate students to engage with academic research articles for the class, while supporting them with strategies on how to approach scholarly work. I placed a particular emphasis on research by women and scholars of color, as we explored the process of knowledge creation, which encouraged students to develop their identities as scholar-learners. I also invited diverse guest speakers to present their work and their path to academia, to give all of my students examples of scholars they could related to. However, not all students taking such a survey course will

become researchers in the field; therefore, I consistently highlighted the role of economic analysis in shaping public policy, to support students' growth as more informed citizens who can interpret policies that affect them. The course culminates with a microfinance loan proposal: students find an entrepreneur on kiva.org, evaluate their project, and craft a persuasive argument using class concepts to fund their loan.[1]

Engaging with Students

Good teaching is not the pronouncing of knowledge into waiting empty vessels, but inherently about individual human beings coming together with a common purpose. As a teacher who values diversity and learning, I make it a goal to meet students where they are and create the conditions for them to learn. This also makes a more inclusive classroom, where students from a diversity of backgrounds feel they have the tools to succeed and that their lived experiences are valued contributions. In the shift to online instruction, I had to adapt my teaching style and course structure to students around the world with different technology constraints. Given the circumstances, I prioritized creating a personal connection and a supportive environment during an uncertain time. I used multiple communication tools: quick polls for those attending synchronous lecture to check comprehension, weekly extra-credit surveys that asked what students were confused or struggling with, regular emails, and individual midterm check-ins that asked about students' overall well-being during tumultuous times.[2] This approach, of appreciating the backgrounds and experience of each student, also makes me a good interdisciplinary teacher.

Students, in their evaluations, recognize and respond to my interest and investment in them:

- "I really appreciated Laura's passion for this course. It was clear through her live zoom lectures that she is truly invested in the work that she is teaching her students. She is very willing to slow things down to further explain material that may be confusing. Very adapting and understanding of student comprehension."
- "The instructor is clearly very interested and motivated to help students apply and understand material as well as succeed. As an economics major some of the classes tend to feel the same and repetitive after a while, however this was not the case for this class."

Engaging with Course Content

Students are much more willing to engage deeply with the material if they see this attitude towards learning modeled. I care deeply about the content I teach, not only in my own sub-field but also in bringing economic frameworks to everyday life. My practical experience in development economics, including work on a large-scale impact evaluation with government partners in Uganda, lends weight to the importance of the concepts I teach. In evaluations, students consistently remark on my passion for the material and ability to incorporate my own experience. Students also shared that my teaching highlighted how they can use economics to think about the world. These comments are the most meaningful to me, indicating that I succeeded in creating a learning environment that goes beyond the classroom.

- "This instructor was clearly very knowledgeable about development economics and is passionate about her work/teaching. She is super fun and also a great lecturer."

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[1] The TAs and I then selected two loans to fund from the best proposals.

[2] In this check-in, one student wrote "Thank you so much for asking how we are all doing, UC Davis is an extremely difficult school to begin with and all of the stuff going on has made it even harder for me, so it truly means a lot to have a professor who is aware of our situations on a more personal level."

- "How relevant it is to our world and we can see connections with what we are learning to our own lives."
- "It just opened my mind, I learned a lot of critical thinking skills."
- "always included helpful additional content for us to read out of interest on our own time. Her passion for the course was always evident at each lecture. Whenever complex concepts arose, she ensured that every question was answered with detail and provided such clarity for the class. Her exams were challenging but always reasonable and relevant to what we learned. I most appreciated how she took the time to meet with me individually when I was struggling with a problem set. Her enthusiasm for teaching is clear and she made the remote learning process smooth and worthwhile."
- "The class also challenged me to go beyond simply getting the right answer, and to actually understand the material"
- "She guided me through the difficult homework questions without simply giving me the answers. After finishing each assignment I felt a sense of accomplishment. The best part is I actually retained the information too and came up with my own questions."

Teaching Interests & Evaluations

I have a strong background in development economics, applied econometrics, and public and political economics, so would be excited to teach courses in these fields at a variety of levels. I would also be interested in teaching research design and/or quasi-experimental methods, as well as intro or intermediate microeconomics courses. Additionally, I would be a good candidate to teach economics courses targeted for students with different disciplinary backgrounds, as well as co-teach interdisciplinary thematic courses.

During my time at UC Davis, I was the instructor of record for Microeconomics of Development (ARE/ECN 115A) during spring quarter 2020, with 238 students enrolled. I also served as a teaching assistant twice for the Economics of Global Poverty (ARE/ECN 166), a smaller advanced undergraduate course focused on the causes and consequences of poverty as well as policies and impact evaluation methods, and three times for the Economics of Small Farms (IAD 201), an interdisciplinary course required for a master's degree in International Agriculture and Development.

	average (1-5)	The TA...	average (1-5)
Overall educational value (course)	4.3	was organized and prepared	4.7
Intellectual content (course)	4.3	presented at a level I could understand	4.6
Overall teaching effectiveness	4.3	was approachable	4.9
Presentation of the material	4.3	recognized confused students	4.6
Preparation and organization	4.4	provided thoughtful, concise answers	4.6
Availability	4.5	helped me understand concepts	4.6
Enthusiasm	4.7	was available and helpful	4.9
Fairness and timeliness of grading	4.3	overall did a good job	4.7
Usefulness of assignments	4.2		

Table 1: Mean responses from instructor evaluations in spring 2020. 5 = excellent, 4 = very good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = fair, 1 = poor. 96 responding students.

Table 2: Mean responses from teaching assistant evaluations between winter 2016 and spring 2018. 5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree. 73 responding students, 31 of which took economics of global poverty, 42 took economics of small farms (master's level).