

Mallika Sharma

Teaching Statement

As an educator during the PhD program, I view teaching as a collaborative, reciprocal and evolving process, through reflection and shared curiosity. I have a few primary goals that I always seek to accomplish.

- **Clarify the purpose and relevance of economics.** Regardless of the course level, I strive to help students understand *why* the course matters - both within the discipline of economics and in the broader world. I believe that when students grasp the motivation behind economic theories, they engage more deeply and critically with the content.
- **Cultivating problem-solving and critical thinking.** I aim to encourage students to ask questions and guide them through their problems, while also looking for alternative approaches and working through economic reasoning. My aim is to equip them with the tools to apply theoretical foundations to real-world challenges, allowing development of a mindset driven by curiosity and thoughtful exploration.
- **Supporting diverse academic interests.** In all classes that I have taught, I have encountered students with varied goals and disciplinary leanings. So I make a conscious effort to incorporate examples from all fields in economics so that students can connect course material to their own interests and explore potential paths for future study or employment.

Teaching approach:

Since my research entails a lot of empirical work, I bring this orientation into my classes by encouraging students to connect the theoretical foundations from other coursework to the courses I teach. I try to bridge theory and practice, including policy discussions, case studies, large datasets for hands-on experience to engage and critically explore key statistics and concepts, while also getting insights into institutional background and policy context about the topic. I understand, from student responses, some students go far and beyond to what's asked because they are driven by genuine curiosity and desire to explore certain topics more deeply.

I also strongly believe that a classroom should foster an environment that supports independent thinking and experimentation. I emphasize that learning is a process, and there are no right or wrong answers when you are developing an approach to a problem. I believe that this could help build confidence in their reasoning and also take ownership and accountability for their learning.

I also try to create a safe space for broader conversations. Sometimes students ask questions that may be partially relevant to the course. For instance, in ECON 311 Computer Applications in Economics - where a lot of economics concepts were conducted on Excel, students have often asked how these skills translate to future employment, especially when many were versed with more complicated statistical software. I emphasized that Excel (including VBA) remains a widely used tool in industry, and proficiency

in Excel is a valuable asset. Some of these discussions helped students see the practical value of their learning. I have also had students asking whether it is the “right time” to take the course, given their academic load and career plans. Rather than offering an answer, based on my perception, I try to create a space for open dialogue, weighing the pros and cons, and reflecting on their goals and strategies to manage their challenges. I believe even the small gestures from instructors make the students more comfortable in their academic journey, which can get overwhelming for some.

Self-evaluation:

I know I have been partially successful at my pedagogical goals through student feedback, both formal and informal. I often share that while I teach, I am constantly learning alongside them on how to teach better, giving more real-world examples, making my skill of teaching more dynamic, one that evolves through feedback and dialogue. I emphasize the importance of learning being a two-way street - students learning course content, and both parties also supporting their intellectual growth. While some students initially care about their grades, I try to engage them in class such that their interest in the subject grows and their intellectual development.

I take inspiration from Dr. Trevor Tombe whose Ph.D level International Trade course I took early in my program. Although I did not have specific interest in the field, his way of teaching, ability to simplify the concepts developed a genuine curiosity in international trade. This exemplified how an instructor’s commitment to clarity can transform a student’s relationship with the material. That is the level of commitment towards the course I try to imbibe. I believe this dedication gives them a sense that their instructor cares about their learning, beyond assignments and grades.

Sme evidence of effective teaching:

Selected comments from teaching multiple courses below:

“Malika did a very good job of applying the material that was learned in class to solve challenging problems in the tutorials. Her approach to teaching was very effective and helped me understand the material better.”

“Having the opportunity to ask specific questions about course material and have in depth explanation”

“Mallika is very knowledgeable and well prepared. She always will give us extra time if we have questions and she won’t go until you understand. She is a great TA”

“Doing questions that appear on the outline and assignments. She also obviously genuinely cared about if we understood and was willing to stay late to explain further. She knew the material extremely well and understood the math which was very helpful when we got confused.”

“Mallika was absolutely lovely. The material is tough, and there is a lot of it, but she was always prepared and was very good at making complex concepts clear. I really appreciated her willingness to go overtime when there was lots of material to cover, and she regularly stayed around after class to clarify things. She’s clearly very committed to her job, and I think she will make an excellent prof.”