Teaching Philosophy Statement

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As a student, I was usually too afraid to raise my hand and ask questions. With the experience of being on the other side of the classroom, I could understand that I was definitely not alone back then. Sometimes, a question left unasked may lead to higher insecurity towards class content. Therefore, beyond anticipating frequently asked questions, an instructor must identify students' reactions throughout the lecture, so that everyone stays comfortable in class. Instructor-student interactions are a crucial part of classroom dynamics, and one of my main roles is to motivate students to ask questions, be curious, and leave the classroom motivated for the upcoming lectures. Despite all insecurities that a subject may generate, instructors are also content broadcasters, and how to communicate it really matters to create engagement. Developing an accessible pedagogical environment, thus allowing for an intuitive and active learning process, is my main goal as an instructor.

Teaching is one of the most beautiful acts of kindliness and care one can perform in life. Fewer things tend to be more rewarding than witnessing students learn a new content. As a student, I define a learning episode as a mental *finger snapping* moment. In other words, the concept suddenly makes sense in my mind, allowing for new learning possibilities. And I've had many opportunities of experiencing these moments (sometimes followed by a timid smile) as an instructor. When you see yourself on the other side of the classroom, you come to realize that your role is to pick the concepts that are floating in the surrounding air, acting as a guide to place these into students' minds. When this route is rode without trouble, fingers do snap!

Obviously, these events develop with experience, and I believe there is still much more to learn within this teaching journey. As of today, I build my teaching philosophy around three main principles: *empathy*, *intuition*, and relating *theory with real-world phenomena*.

Empathy

During my first semesters as an undergraduate student, when starting a new class, my first thought used to be "am I going to pass this class?," or "how many exams do we have? Are they hard?;" and I know that these thoughts are also pervasive in some of my students' minds. I do not want any of them to be overwhelmed by exams or assignments. Therefore, my first lecture is always about the syllabus, especially how graded assessments will be designed. More importantly, I always emphasize the fact that no subject that has not been fully covered in class will be part of an exam or assignment. This already relaxes students, giving them the confidence that by studying the readings and lecture notes, they have all resources for a successful journey.

An interesting episode that has taught me a lot pedagogically was one Accounting class I attended as an undergraduate student. Whenever asked, the instructor would always reply a student's question with another question, sometimes on the same subject, sometimes on others. In case of no answer, he would then extend the question to the entire classroom. This process would move back and forth until the question was fully answered by the audience. And it would sometimes

come from completely unrelated topics motivated by the instructor, such as movie and music references. This active learning strategy encouraged class participation, boosting students' confidence towards the content. This is a technique I regularly apply in my Statistics, Econometrics, and Microeconomics classes, and it usually motivates even the most discreet students.

These are empathy exercises, where constructing knowledge overcomes the intrinsic fear of asking questions. In my teaching experience, anyone can clarify one's doubt. The classroom should never be seen as an antagonistic environment between instructor and students, but indeed as a constructive space where everyone learns and collaborates as much as possible. We all come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse interests, so why not learn from all? This is only possible in an inclusive environment.

Intuition

Economics is a heavily mathematical and abstract science. This fact easily creates frustration, and it is not rare to ask for an example where there is none available. Students urge for concrete examples, and their attention may be lost if they do not see where some concept or model come from. To address this issue, my Econometrics and Microeconomics classes are devoted to understand in depth the conceptual root of all of tests and models we use. If we do not present what lies "under the hood" of an equation or line of code, then these will be just another equation and code. But if we provide their intuitive appeal, then there is a clear reason to use them.

The paragraph above connects with another teaching episode. Once, I was introducing students to Ordinary Least Squares coefficients, and at one point in a formula there was a multiplication between x and y. Then, I asked students why these two variables were being multiplied together, rather than, say, divided by each other. Even the Math majors would stay quiet for almost two minutes, and no answer would come up. After a few suggestions, students got both frustrated and excited. Frustrated because this was something that elementary school should have taught us (myself included). And excited because they finally came to know why they do so much variable multiplication: simply to look at the interaction between two variables! This episode has taught me how important it is to give the intuition about elementary concepts. Usually, we know how to calculate integrals and derivatives, but miss points in basic operations.

Theory and the real world

Where do we place our content outside the classroom? This is one of the main caveats in the pedagogy of Economics. Obviously, in no area of knowledge are we going to apply 100% of what was learned. However, one important practice is to point out where and when most concepts may be applied in real life situations. One semester, when teaching Principles of Microeconomics, one student asked me where it would be possible to apply the content she spent the entire semester studying. My answer was: "you will never see anyone maximizing her utility at the grocery store, but if you see yourself in a situation where your input will be needed to assess the sales determinants of a certain product, you will know what to say, since it comes from microeconomic theory."

Most of my current teaching gravitates around Statistics and Econometrics, and the growing interest in Data Science attracts many students to these classes. Beyond the theoretical primer, my focus is to apply the concepts as much as possible, through the use of official databases, applying

models to test economic theories, and also requiring students to write short research projects. In these, students perform data analysis from scratch: formulating the research question, collecting and treating the data, and performing the necessary analyses to answer that question and present the answers. Most of the times, this is their first opportunity to actually write a research paper, and such experience will be relevant for future professional and academic appointments.

A necessary digression: Teaching amidst a pandemic

In the middle of the Spring 2020 semester, we were all faced with the unveiling of the COVID-19 pandemic. This new scenario impacted our families, students, colleagues, and society as a whole. We have all been processing this situation in different ways, and our teaching and learning methods have also been reshaped to adapt to this new reality.

At the same time, teaching and learning also offer us opportunities to face this period through a different lens. As an instructor, one of my main goals during this (still) social distancing period to be virtually close to my students, so that classes serve as a relief from the current crisis. And for this I am grateful for the University of Utah's Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence (CTLE) for offering the *Cyber Pedagogy* and *Teaching in Higher Education* classes. These have strongly contributed to the most challenging features of (remote) teaching, without which it would be much harder to face such a unique period.

In the future, the pandemic will be gone. However, it will leave marks on all of us. But my sincere hope is that, as educators, we all become more tolerant, flexible, and mature to gradually return to the classroom and provide good experiences to all our students. Turning online environments into welcoming communities is not an easy task, but these current efforts will also reflect on improved face-to-face classes in the near future.