Teaching Statement

Martin B. Schmitz[*]

I find teaching to be a very valuable part of the academic experience. My goal as an educator is to provide the students with the necessary tools to become independent critical thinkers. In order to create an inclusive environment that fosters student learning both inside and outside of the classroom, I strive to explain core concepts in a way that makes them accessible to students from a wide variety of backgrounds, to make myself approachable and available to students, and to clearly communicate course expectations.

My teaching philosophy has been shaped by my years as a teaching assistant at Vanderbilt University, my experience as an instructor for two courses at the University of Wuerzburg, and the training and management of twelve research assistants. I believe that anyone with a PhD in economics should be able to teach any undergraduate course in economics, given sufficient preparation. I would be willing and able to teach any course at the undergraduate level. I would be best suited to teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in economic history, the economics of innovation, and econometrics. I would be very excited to teach a course in network econometrics.

I served as a teaching assistant for nine semesters during my time at Vanderbilt. In total, I was the assistant for five unique courses spanning fifteen sections. This diverse experience allowed me to learn from the teaching styles of many professors across a broad range of subjects. In contrast to professors who often teach the same set of courses over the years, my work as a teaching assistant allowed me to contribute to and follow the development of a group of undergraduate students over time. It fills me with joy to see how students, who initially struggled with their very first course in economics in their freshman year, become more and more interested in and devoted to the field, choose a major in economics, and develop a surprisingly fine understanding of economic concepts that sometimes exceeds the intuitive understanding of PhD economists.

Below is a summary of teaching evaluations for the last six courses I have served as teaching assistant. The table presents the scores for each of the two questions: 1. Overall, how effective was the instruction you received from this teaching assistant? 2. How helpful and responsive was the teaching assistant? The department averages are shown in parenthesis. The scale runs from 1 (worst) to 5 (best).

course	semester	class size	responses	Q1	Q2
3035-01 Econometric Methods	S2019	18	11	3.82 (3.87)	4.22 (4.11)
3035-02 Econometric Methods	S2019	21	10	3.86 (3.87)	4.00 (4.11)
1020-01 Principles of Microecon.	F2019	163	58	4.27 (4.12)	4.44 (4.24)
3032-02 Applied Econometrics	S2020	34	12	3.33 (4.21)	3.25 (4.30)
2160-01 Strategic Analysis	F2020	81	24	4.12 (4.36)	4.40 (4.41)
2160-01 Strategic Analysis	S2021	82	19	3.83 (4.38)	4.11 (4.49)

Although I was younger than most of the students in my class when I taught for the first time at the University of Wuerzburg in the summer semester 2010, my teaching evaluations

[*]Department of Economics, Vanderbilt University, martin.schmitz@vanderbilt.edu

were quite favorable. On a scale from 1 (best) to 6 (worst), I received scores between 1.6 and 2.3 on the questions that apply to the quality of my teaching, averaging to a score of 1.86 overall.[1]

I always try to use several examples when introducing new concepts. After conveying the concepts, I encourage students to use what they have just learned to analyze real-world questions. I noticed that having the students work on small research projects is often one of the best ways to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the newly-learned concepts.

Teaching evaluations don't allow us to measure the knowledge and skills that students take away from our instruction. The training and supervision of twelve research assistants allowed me to observe what they learned from my instructions and provided me with insights on how to teach effectively. The data collection for two of my research projects involved several challenging tasks that required the extensive training of the research assistants. The quality of the work of my research assistants provided me with a rough measure of the quality of my instructions.

Again, I noticed that it is key to start with simple examples before introducing a new concept and that it helps to encourage the students to come up with similar or related examples of their own after the introduction of the new concept. After following these steps, I found it extremely helpful to show the research assistants the bigger picture. Sharing as much information on the research project as possible keeps the students motivated and improves their ability to make decisions independently. I am planning to also include this step in my regular teaching. By allowing the students to get a sense of how a newly-learned concept fits into the bigger picture, realizing the importance of the new concept becomes each individual student's own, motivating discovery.

---

[1]The course that I taught at the University of Wuerzburg in the winter semester 2011/2012 was not evaluated. The number of students who attended my tutorial instead of other tutors' tutorials continually increased as the semester progressed, though admittedly, this could also have been due to the fact that my two time slots might have been convenient for the students.