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Teaching Statement

My approach to teaching is based around the following three guiding principles.

First, I must be innovative in delivering course content. Imparting insight and knowledge is much more likely to succeed when theory is illustrated with real-world data, equations are illustrated with graphics, or abstract concepts are explained with analogy to real-world objects. For example, when teaching mathematical methods for economics to first year undergraduates at Durham University, some students would struggle to grasp the properties underlying functions of many variables. To help them understand this concept, I would display rotating images of three-dimensional shapes on the interactive whiteboard and draw the same shapes in two dimensions using contour lines. Just as contour lines drawn close together on a map indicate hilly areas, curves close together on the white board indicated steeper regions of the function. Students were able to relate this to their map-reading experiences. Innovation has never been so important as today, with universities transitioning to a world of increased online content. In designing a new course, I would seek to harness the version control capabilities provided by GitHub (which I use to host my own website and research repositories) to encourage student collaboration and streamline content. Version control is useful for any project that changes over time - including assignments - and promotes an open data approach that would serve students well in their future working lives.

Second, I must display energy, enthusiasm and empathy for what I am teaching. Whether lecturing in a large theatre or teaching a small group, instructor enthusiasm transmits directly and spreads quickly. If the students believe that you are interested in what you are conveying they can clearly discern *why* this should interest them, then they are much more likely to engage with the material being presented. The first five minutes of any classroom session are crucial. In my undergraduate seminar teaching at Durham University, I would personally greet the students and ask them which parts of the course they have found interesting and/or difficult so far. Then, I would outline what they should hope to get out of that class and why it would be worth their time. If I could point to a direct real-world application in which the economic tools being taught might be useful, so much the better. Instructor energy and enthusiasm facilitates learner to content interactions, encourages peer-wise interactions and makes for a more rewarding teaching environment.

Third, I must be flexible and open in my approach. Economics attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds and it is important to recognise and embrace this diversity. Some students relate to precise mathematical arguments, others to verbal intuition. Some students prefer to interact directly in the classroom, others prefer to absorb information and consider it independently before formulating an argument. When running econometric help sessions for the economics dissertation module at Durham University, I also tried to be software agnostic, refreshing my skills with R, Stata and Python. It is my job as a teacher to embrace these different skills and outlooks and to make learning accessible for as many students as possible.

I enjoy helping students to understand new concepts and at the same time find that this process helps me to continue questioning assumptions and theories. My objective is to ensure that, in every class I teach, I make a positive contribution to the learning experience of my students.

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