

# Teaching Statement

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Both of my parents are university professors, and I grew up in an environment where teaching, learning, and students are common topics. Before teaching at Rutgers University, I taught high school English for one year when I was a sophomore in China. One question I constantly ask myself is how I can make my students' classroom learning experience better than that of online courses. My answer so far is — involvement, customization, and innovation.

## Involvement

*"I am very impressed that you interact with students by asking questions,"* Prof. Campbell told me after sitting in one of my classes. Instead of simply instructing, this Socratic approach helps to motivate new topics, review previous contents, and encourage students to engage.

In 2017 spring semester, I did an experiment in my Intermediate Macro classes to promote class participation. I recorded the number of times for students correctly answering my questions and used it as an extra credit to add to their final scores. Although it was a big task for two sessions each with more than 60 students, this rule dramatically improved the class discussion participation and their exam scores. One special case was a Vietnamese American girl who always sat in the front row and took notes carefully but never tried to answer questions. I noticed her hesitation and talked to her after the class. My encouragement worked. She started to participate and the success of answering questions further sparked her learning interests. Her grade improved from a C+ to an A.

Pop-up quizzes are an efficient tool to engage students too. I usually conduct a pop-up quiz in the first class of every week which can encourage students to review the course material during the weekend and get ready for the new contents. A good way to maximize the effectiveness of a quiz or exam is to review the questions immediately after the quiz. This quick response can deepen their understanding. I also notice that students are more likely to discuss questions with me or with other students.

## Customization

Introductory and advanced courses require different teaching styles; even the same courses offered in the regular semester, the summer, or different years should be quite different. To better understand my students, I usually conduct two surveys during the semester — one in the first class about their general information, which determines whether I need to give them a brief math boot camp, and one before the midterm about their opinions on the pace of teaching, homework load, and etc., which provides me ideas how to adjust my teaching in the second half of the semester.

I have taught and assisted with several introductory courses, i.e. Money and Banking, Economics of Population, and Economics of Development, for which I always prepare many real-life examples to connect students' life experience with the theories and models. For example, when discussing hyperinflation, I like to show them his-

torical photos, such as kids playing with stacks of currency in Germany in 1920s. To illustrate a formula, I usually come up with a toy question with simple numbers and go through the calculation process step-by-step on the blackboard, so that students can follow the logic closely.

For advanced theoretical courses like Intermediate Macro, I particularly emphasize the setting and steps to derive the model, because many students tend to be intimidated by the complicated setting and then dislike the course. My strategy is successful, as shown in one comment: *"This course has encouraged my intellectual growth because I always thought that I only liked microeconomics and didn't care much for macro. This course made me really like and understand macro and how everything affects each other."*

I notice that students attending summer sessions are often more motivated than those in regular semesters. My strategy to cater to their needs is to add advanced application questions in problem sets, as well as in the exams as bonus questions. The smaller class size in summer sessions also enables me to conduct in-depth discussion with students about applications.

Sometimes students consult me about their academic or professional development in my office hour or even after finishing the course. I really enjoy helping students make progress and never hesitate in giving my own time to talk or write to them. The happiest moment is when I receive their good news on job offers or school admissions.

### **Innovation**

I have also participated in an innovative course for the freshmen at Honors College which admits top students at Rutgers University from different majors. 16 parallel sessions were taught by 12 PhD students and post-docs from both humanity and STEM majors. We introduced broad topics related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and guided students to develop group projects of social businesses aiming to target those goals.

This general education course consists of intensive in-class discussion on various topics. The new Classroom Response System is very helpful. For example, we like to use *Poll Everywhere* to facilitate a debate or vote for the performance of group presentations. *Word Cloud* is also an interesting tool to collect students' ideas simultaneously.

The group project on creating a social business is a brilliant part of course design which encourage students to integrate what they learnt with their own major knowledge on the basis of team work. The best team in my class tried to use coffee residues to make cheap home water filters based on one student's high school project. Under my guidance, students revised this project several rounds, for example, connecting this product to the water crisis in Newark caused by lead pipes. Finally, our team got the second place in the Pitch Competition at Honors College.

### **Conclusion**

I strive to teach more than knowledge and I aim to help students to learn, to critically think, and to improve themselves. To achieve these goals, I am dedicated to getting students involved, customizing my teaching to their needs, and applying innovative tools and forms to improve their learning experience.

**Comments from Students:**

*"Sarah's doing a great job teaching and I enjoy the class because of her."*

*"The instructor made it her priority that everyone understood what she was saying and actually studied. She explained concepts in a simple, easy-to-understand manner."*

*"Nice teacher, obviously cared how the students do."*

*"The instructor did a great job explaining all of the concepts thoroughly to make sure that we had a solid foundation before we moved onto more difficult topics."*

*"She answers questions with detailed proves."*

*"The instructor was very thorough in explaining concepts and had a very intuitive approach to explain concepts. Overall an excellent instructor."*

*"This course has encouraged my intellectual growth because I always thought that I only liked microeconomics and didn't care much for macro. This course made me really like and understand macro and how everything affects each other."*

*"This course was great to take over the summer. It was just the right amount of work. I was not interested in this subject prior to taking the class but I became interested as I took it."*

*"She made me believe in economics."*

*"Instructor was very clear understanding the topics discussed in class. She would constantly ask questions and made sure everyone knew the material before moving on. In addition, she has a good pace in teaching the material."*

*"The instructor helped me stay engaged throughout the whole class."*

*"I definitely found myself participating a lot more in this class than I would in others."*

*"I like how she always provided exercise questions for quizzes and exams, they greatly helped in learning."*

*"I like that all of the material was available online and I was able to look at what I did wrong during quizzes or exams. "*

*"I enjoy all of the notes that was provided and the way she lectures."*

*"The lecture system supplemented with exercises to go back on to review the lecture material was a good system."*

*"I now feel like I have a good enough foundation to have success in more advanced economics classes down the road."*

*"She has made me think abstractly and apply different concepts with one another."*

*"We learned interesting material that I will potentially use in my career."*

*"The professor makes the lecture very interesting."*

*"The instructor was very understanding and caring about the students."*