Teaching Statement

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November 10, 2019

I am passionate about teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level. My priorities are (1) to be fair and precise in student assessment, and (2) to give students durable skills that can be applied outside of class. Below I will describe my teaching experience at UCLA and then give a summary of my unique perspective on teaching economics.

Teaching experience. As a graduate student at UCLA, I served as a teaching assistant (TA) in my second, fourth, and fifth year. During those years, I TA'd for courses in introductory and intermediate microeconomics (Econ 1, Econ 11 and Econ 101) and statistics for economists (Econ 41). Econ 1 explained to students what it means to think like an economist and what are the types of problems that economics can help solve. Econ 11 and Econ 41 mainly served to give undergraduate students the basic mathematical tools, which were later applied in courses such as Econ 101 to understand questions such as, what are the effects of market power, or how are equilibrium prices determined.

TAing at UCLA was a very satisfying experience with some unique challenges that helped shape my outlook on teaching. The students were very heterogeneous in their degree of interest in economics, as well as the speed by which they picked up concepts. The slower students were often eager to get extra practice and read lecture notes in advance. My first lesson was to *never* let such students run out of material. Students need as much practice as they can get. They especially need practice in coming

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up with creative, non-obvious solutions to problems, so that they shake off the expectation that they merely need to memorize a cook-book for solving problems.

Probably one of the more important things I learned from my experience as a TA is that mistakes, no matter how minor, can be very disruptive to students. It is easy to fail to appreciate this once you become accustomed to interacting with graduate students and faculty, whose knowledge of economics is sufficiently deep so as to see past minor mistakes in, for example, a solution to a problem. I try to prioritize clarity and purge minor mistakes from lectures and notes. Something that has helped me better relate to my students is my own personal experience learning to read and write Farsi. My reading and writing skills are around a first-grade level, and when I text back and forth with Iranian friends and family, their messages often contain minor errors. A single misplaced letter can make it impossible for me to understand entire paragraphs. Thinking about this particular experience has helped me to better calibrate my lectures to what students need.

My teaching priorities. My first priority fairness and precision in student evaluation. I don't believe that grading is the *only* thing that we teachers do, but I do believe that it is the most important thing we do, beceause it both opens and closes doors to students when they finish their education. Fairness means stating up front what the rules of the evaluation system ares, and not deviating from them ex post. Most importantly, it means minimizing any possibility of cheating. When it comes to this, I believe that prevention, rather than punishment, is the most effective and amicable tool. Proctoring exams was by far the least enjoyable part about being a graduate student, but I took the job very seriously and even won the department's proctor of the year award for my fastidiousness.

Precision in assessment means having a sufficiently rich set of assignments and exams to minimize the role of luck, and to distinguish students' understanding of the material to the maximum possible degree. One lesson I learned at UCLA is how crucial it is to give the top students opportunities to challenge and distinguish themselves. Too often, the top quarter of students would get close to full credit on an exam—meaning that any residual differences between top students' grades were almost entirely noise. When I design my own exams, they will incorporate tranches of difficulty to ensure that every student will at some point be challenged.

My second priority is to give students durable and practical skills. At the undergraduate level, I believe that this necessitates giving students exposure to computation. Wherever possible, I will incorporate computing exercises into my curriculum. This will not only help satisfy some of the excess demand for programming experience, but I think it will also allow me to teach certain concepts better. For example, I think that brute force discrete optimization on a computer is a more intuitive concept than calculus-based methods to a typical undergraduate. By teaching the brute force method first, students will gain a more practical appreciation for the calculus-based method that comes after, and will care more about understanding when it works and when it doesn't. I will also teach students to create and simulate econometric models, and estimators, in order to acquire hands-on practical experience with estimation. This is the only way to understand practically all of the eceonometric questions where the answer is "it depends," such as (1) how large sample sizes need to be for asymptotic properties to hold, (2) what are the effects of model misspecification, and (3) how does endogeneity bias our estimates?

I believe that the durable skills lacking from graduate level training (including my own) relate to the philosophy of science. Most of what modern economists do appeals to the scientific method. And yet, we learn very little about it. For example, why do we value model parsimony and falsifiability? When should a model be refined, and when should it be rejected? What features of the real world can be ignored in a model? Thinking deeply about these things is what distinguishes social scientists from data scientists.