Teaching Statement

Lawrence Ogbeifun

University of Mississippi—ogbeifunlawrence@yahoo.com

Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.—John Steinbeck

A teacher's work shapes minds and resonates across generations of students. With this belief, I strive to achieve three goals in my teaching: clarifying the details in simple terms, connecting the details to the big picture, and creating a fertile environment for interaction.

In my first experience as a teacher, I taught high school students in a small community in Nigeria. I had students whose limited access to facilities and materials conducive to academic work affected their enthusiasm and readiness to learn. Considering this challenge, I realized that covering the course content alone was inadequate and that finding innovative ways to sustain their interest in my class and school was equally important. For example, I created small discussion groups and engaged the students in academic and extra-curricula exercises. This created bonds amongst the students and increased class participation and attendance. This experience has impacted my approach to teaching, which emphasizes student involvement and improvement.

As an instructor at the University of Mississippi, I have alternated between two core courses—Principles of Microeconomics and Principles of Macroeconomics—in the Fall and Spring semesters since 2020. For each session, my preparation begins early, which gives me an opportunity to carefully choose the materials and examples most helpful in clarifying the concepts covered in lectures and designing the overall flow of the class. For me, the best way to learn has been by honestly making an effort to find the solutions myself. To foster the same self-reliance among students, I encourage them to attempt each problem independently before demonstrating its solution. Since my students come from very different educational backgrounds, I am mindful about explaining each detail and resolving doubts thoroughly such that no student is left behind. During office hours, I provide a range of guidance tailored to students' individual needs, from simply suggesting reference books to directing their thinking on how to approach problems. As I go from one step to the next, I prompt the students to chime in with the reasoning or the concept applied at each stage. Encouraging class participation further helps me gauge

---

the need to discuss a topic differently and think of better ways of explaining concepts, which, in turn, facilitates my growth as a teacher.

To achieve my goal of creating a fertile environment for interaction, I ask students about their understanding of economics on the first day of my introductory classes. Most of them are quick to give the textbook definitions of economics. However, I try to steer them to understand how the decision to attend college can be used to explain economics. This approach has always helped the students be comfortable and disabuse their minds from any misconceptions about economics. In addition, I have always relied on real-world examples to help them understand the topics we discuss in class. For instance, I recommend economics podcasts to my students related to topics in the syllabus. We review the discussions before I treat the chapter, and I always see them as more motivated to contribute because of their practical understanding of the topic. I maintain an open-door policy and allow students to come and see me outside office hours if they have legitimate concerns.

I believe that my teaching experience has equipped me well to teach both undergraduate and graduate courses. Aligning with my research interests, I am particularly keen on teaching a class on macroeconomics at both these levels. My ideal course would build the foundation for macroeconomics at the undergraduate level by covering production and growth, forces that determine real variables, the monetary system, and the model of aggregate demand and supply. The Mankiw (2020) textbook is a reliable and essential resource for these topics. At the graduate level, the goal would be to prepare students wishing to pursue further graduate studies for a research career and those wishing for industry positions to acquire the tools to analyze complex problems. I look forward to covering the real business cycle model and New Keynesian model with a search and matching environment in this course. Given my research experience at the intersection of macro-labor, monetary and environmental economics, I would bring a unique knowledge of macro-labor modeling and structural frameworks for studying labor market reforms. In addition to deep-diving into the literature on these advanced topics, I would also recommend the textbooks by McCandless (2008) and Dejong and Dave (2007) as essential background readings for this course. The students would be required to solve regular assignments on two essential components of this course—deriving theoretical results and coding algorithms that solve for the equilibrium or estimate a parameter. They will also learn to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of economics papers through writing referee reports on at least two macro papers. To get the research juices flowing, the course would culminate in an end-of-the-semester project proposal by the students.

Personally, I have always strived to improve my teaching methods. Even though I had practical experience teaching at a university in Nigeria, I assisted several professors for the different semesters before I taught my first class at the University of Mississippi. In addition, I have attended several teaching training and workshop, and I believe these experiences helped shape my approach to teaching and benefited the students in my classes. Despite these efforts to improve, I still believe I have a long way to go to become a better teacher and look for opportunities to improve myself by examining comments from student evaluations and implementing new, proven teaching methods that I read about.

Summary of Teaching Evaluations

Below are the numerical summaries of courses I have taught at the Department of Economics, University of Mississippi. I have also attached the full teacher evaluation result summary for each course.

Term	Course	Mean Ratings
Summer 2020	Econ 202: Principles of Microeconomics	3/5
Fall 2021	Econ 203: Principles of Macroeconomics	3.39/5
Spring 2022	Econ 203: Principles of Macroeconomics	3.8/5

Selected comments from student evaluations. These are selected comments from evaluations of courses I have taught at the Department of Economics, University of Mississippi.

- "I had a good learning experience with this class, I developed better note taking skills from the way he presents the material in class."

- "He made Macro a simple idea and added lots of humor into the mix of learning."

- "He is very friendly and enthusiastic, and pays very close attention to the needs of the class, always soliciting questions and whatnot."

- "He is enthusiastic and wants the best for his students, always engaged with the class."

- "Instructor is passionate about subject. Curriculum is clearly outlined. Lectures are easy to take notes for. "

- "Great examples when teaching class so it's able to relate to the real world."

- "Love lawrence as an instructor, if you consider his course, go for it."

- "Nicest teacher ever!!! He is very passionate about what he teachers!"

- "He is enthusiastic, patient, really wants students to understand."

- "The professor is super kind and enthusiastic."

- "It was a good course and he was very knowledgeable about the subject."