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TEACHING STATEMENT

In first grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia. Many academic hurdles are heightened with dyslexia, and having 25 years to successfully develop a translation layer between school and my own mind gives me a somewhat unusual view of where the well crafted university process can be made both more 1) inclusive to students like myself, and 2) instructive for everyone in the classroom.

With this in mind, remote learning during Covid gave me the opportunity to sand down some of (what I see as) the rough edges of our classroom methods. Here, I'm going to highlight three main ways I aimed to do this, and how I've worked to translate them into teaching microeconomics broadly, and specifically Intermediate Microeconomics this summer.

First, I aim to start by asking the 'why' questions. Grant Sanderson, a personal favorite YouTuber and math educator, describes his work as trying to convey the feeling of "inventing math". Similar to the starting points he uses in his videos, the conceptual starting points I've found most instructive begin by asking the question that motivated the original search for the answer. Microeconomics, as we teach it, is well suited to this method. We typically begin intro microeconomics with Ricardo's comparative advantage, specialization, and trade. I've modeled my introduction of and motivation for both my intro and, to a lesser extent, intermediate microeconomics classes around a particular framing of Ricardo's original motivation, asking "Can we do better by working together than we could on our own?" I don't think it's too hyperbolic to say the moment directly following the asking of that question, when specialization bends the PPF out, can blow minds.

Second, I aim to make the conceptual scaffolding straightforward. I see my roles as a teacher fitting mainly into three categories, generally in the following order: 1) introduction of a question or idea and its place next to related questions or ideas; 2) a presentation of an approach to considering or answering the question; and 3) guidance during a student's own work through the question. To operationalize this in my intermediate microeconomics class, I delineated most of the content accordingly: 1) tutorial videos introduced the questions and ideas (which were aimed to be animated and fun enough to binge, but I ran out of time for most modules), 2) demo videos set up and solved corresponding problems, and 3) homework was aimed to follow

directly from demo videos but with the training wheels taken off. One consequence of dyslexia is that I am relatively more aware of classroom logistical overhead. And explicitly delineating the timeline of the class in this way is how I would have wanted the class to be structured if I were a student. And it seems students had a clear view of what was important, how to work with the concepts, and how to synthesize it with what we already know.

Third, I aim to make the classroom a more inclusive environment, especially for neurodivergent students and those struggling with academics in general. To take a step in this direction I built the assessment structure explicitly around demonstrating competency, both to pull out each student's strengths and to signal that the class is a place to develop. To this aim I adapted the traditional grading structure in two main ways. First, I set up five miniexams, one per week, and downweighted a student's worst scores. This meant no one exam could sink a high achieving student's grade and offered poorer performing students an incentive to improve. And second, I held weekly check-ins with all students broken into small groups, where they would verbally deliver a randomly chosen homework question to me in front of their peers, "graded" on both their mastery and whether they were upfront with what they didn't know. This gave students another layer of accountability and gave me another opportunity to offer micro-corrections to their mastery of the material. Although it turned out to be quite a bit of work, these two modifications made the class more inclusive and had the side effect of lowering students' incentives to cheat, lowering the stakes, and giving students incentives to recover from failure.

As it happens, I believe my teaching goals have ended up working well for university education during Covid and have potential to continue to work well when we return to a more normal time. Beginning with ~~original~~ questions, sanding down the edges, and grading for competency have turned out to be more work but seemed to be a natural fit with a semi-flipped classroom model, and may have even minted an economist or two.