

Teaching Statement

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I believe that teaching goes beyond delivering knowledge to students to include helping them to construct knowledge for themselves. For me, student-centered knowledge construction requires three steps: 1) asking questions, 2) finding and evaluating sources to acquire data and information, and 3) deploying strong analytical skills. Whenever I teach, I focus on developing these three core competencies in my students.

I encourage students to ask questions prompted by their curiosity, which is the best way to be fully engaged in learning. For example, as a Teaching Assistant for Principles of Microeconomics at Midlands State University, I observed that many students did not understand basic but important economic terms such as “scarcity”, “incentives” and “opportunity cost” partly because they thought those concepts were not relevant to their lives. To tackle this misconception and to inspire their engagement by letting them realize that this was a reality of life, I asked them to read one economics/business news article per week and develop discussion questions that connected the current event to the theory they were learning in class. When students saw how theoretical concepts could influence their own lives, such as when we examined how they chose to spend three hours at the movies the night before an exam, the course material became relevant to them, and they became more enthusiastic learners.

As a Visiting Lecturer for Agricultural Economics in the Economics Department at Midlands State University, I had no problem getting my students interested in the course material. However, unlike the students in Microeconomics, they lacked the necessary background in agricultural policies and quantitative methods to formulate questions. Although the topics covered in both courses are related, their audiences are entirely different. I taught the Agricultural Economics course to 58 fourth year undergraduate students with varying work-related exposures and career prospects. To solve this problem, I created illustrations using world examples, published research papers and newspaper articles to explain basic concepts in agricultural economics, such as food security and agricultural policies, in an interactive and applied way. I invited them to look around and see how

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civil unrests were distorting food distribution and worsening food insecurity in Zimbabwe and how incidents of violence against foreign nationals (xenophobia) and their business were putting a heavy tax on food supermarket chains in South Africa and the Sub-Saharan Africa region. In their course evaluations, students commended my efforts to tailor the materials to their needs and my willingness to find creative ways to help them. This experience has taught me how to adapt my teaching style to a particular group of students with different lived experiences, backgrounds, and passions to ensure that they can engage with the course materials and ask probing questions about it and enhance their understanding.

After cultivating a culture of asking questions, I teach my students to think, find, evaluate, and use various sources of information to answer their questions. In the classroom, I incorporate new technologies to help students understand data analysis. For example, when I was a Teaching Assistant for Statistical Analysis and Applications, I used several innovative learning methods, including designing four ANOVA experiments and running electoral prediction markets. Recognizing the limitations of how microeconomic theory is usually taught, I also designed background information, detailed lesson plans, and student instructions for a variety of topics in economics which were also applicable to agricultural economics and development. The same techniques were also applied to Development Economics, a course I taught at Midlands State University.

The primary reason I chose an academic life over other inviting interests is that I enjoy teaching and genuinely care for students' success. I am particularly interested in helping students to be successful in their studies. To me, teaching is an act of optimism, a profession of hope. My approach to teaching is that of a prophet inspiring his students to see the promised land which I have not yet discovered or am about to discover. Quoting Thomas Woodrow Wilson "A professorship is the only feasible place for me, the only place that would afford leisure for reading and for original work, the only strictly literary berth with an income attached."