

TEACHING STATEMENT

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I am enthusiastic about teaching because it allows me to share my passion for economics, inspiring students to develop a long-lasting interest in the discipline. My goals as an instructor are to create a welcoming environment for learning, helping students master class material while providing the support students need to build their careers in economics and grow intellectually. The opportunity to pursue research while interacting with students is the primary reason I wish to work in academia. I have had a variety of exciting opportunities to teach during my career. Below, I describe my experience, teaching methodology, and detailed information about how I approach teaching.

I initiated my teaching career at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil by teaching International Economics and Time-series Econometrics courses at the undergraduate level. In those early opportunities, I developed a passion for teaching that motivated me to pursue a career in academia. During my graduate studies at the University of Illinois, I had the opportunity to construct a solid teaching experience. I first served as a teaching assistant for Economic Statistics II and Intermediate Microeconomics, two large-scale intermediate-level courses from the Economics Department. As an independent instructor, I taught International Trade, an advanced undergraduate level course, for four semesters. The goals of the course are twofold: to teach students to use critical thinking around international trade issues within formal economic frameworks and develop skills to apply the economic concepts to real-world situations.

I strive to engage my students throughout their learning. Because certain concepts, such as theoretical frameworks, tend to be more abstract for students, I motivate each new concept to get my students interested before delving into the details. I start by talking to students about how they can observe these concepts in their daily lives, using examples, newspaper articles, videos, podcasts, and other media related to the topics discussed in class. For instance, when teaching the concept of comparative advantage, I would first talk about how a person that works in two types of activities could use this concept to obtain gains from specialization. I also have incorporated some of the recent research on international trade into my course. The goal is to show students that we—economists—actually use tools (e.g., theoretical models, empirical techniques) that they are learning in class to conduct our research. More importantly, I want to show how our research connects to real life. For example, to illustrate how tariffs can affect the economy, I explain the recent research on the economic consequences of the US-China trade war. Motivation like this often interests students, who are then more eager to learn the material.

I also foster active learning and further engage students by conducting problem-solving activities during class grounded in the real world. To allow each student to think through the problems, I would have my students work independently on the problems first. When demonstrating how to solve a problem, I usually invite my students to participate in the problem-solving process by frequently asking them questions to check their understanding and exchange their thoughts.

As an instructor, I strongly believe in the efficacy of project-based learning. In my course, one of the assignments is to write a semester report. The goal is for students to gain experience writing and applying the models and concepts learned in class to a topic of their interest. The students work on their projects throughout the semester with multiple deadlines while I walk them through the process. For example, the students need to identify data and references and coherently organize their thoughts and evidence to support their arguments with objective evidence gleaned from the appropriate literature.

As an assistant professor, I would be able and delighted to teach at the graduate and undergraduate levels. While I am enthusiastic about the challenge of teaching classes outside my fields, I bring special knowledge to courses (at both undergraduate and graduate levels) on economic history, international economics, economics of immigration, and applied econometrics.

SELECTED STUDENT COMMENTS

Below are some of the (anonymous) comments my students wrote at the end of each semester, as part of Illinois' Course Evaluation process.

COURSE AND ROLE	STUDENT'S COMMENT
INTERNATIONAL TRADE (INSTRUCTOR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>"Vini is always very enthusiastic about teaching and really cares for students. He makes the classroom atmosphere a comfortable place to learn."</i> ■ <i>"Instructor did a great job of explaining topics thoroughly, always let students know that he was available for extra help if needed, and was extremely accommodating and understanding"</i> ■ <i>"I learned a lot on trade and am more interested in current events now. Knowledge learned in class is very easily applicable to real life"</i> ■ <i>"The instructor explained difficult theories in an easy way, which is very helpful for us to understand the course materials."</i> ■ <i>"A major strength is that he is patient when it comes to explaining the material, especially during office hours. Another strength is that he is able to transition smoothly to online."</i> ■ <i>"Excellent at communicating with students."</i> ■ <i>"The instructor was always positive & genuinely happy during and outside of the lecture. His demeanor made the course much more enjoyable."</i> ■ <i>"Interesting, and engaging class"</i> ■ <i>"One of my favorite 400s!"</i>
ECONOMIC STATISTICS II (TEACHING ASSISTANT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>"Vinicios is passionate about statistics which seem impossible to me but it makes me want to come to lab. He also teaches well. I only come to lab now because I love his lessons and I fell like I'm learning applicable material."</i> ■ <i>"Vinicios is the best TA I have ever had for a class! He is extremely well prepared, explains everything so well, and makes class enjoyable."</i> ■ <i>"He was always very positive & welcomed students to ask questions. So you didn't have to feel embarrassed if you didn't understand something."</i> ■ <i>"Vinicios is awesome. He is very approachable and always willing to help. So glad I had him as a TA."</i> ■ <i>"Can tell he is interested in what he is teaching. Always willing to answer questions, overall one of my favorite TA's."</i> ■ <i>"You are a great TA, very smart & great energy."</i> ■ <i>"You were a great instructor, made me want to come to class, made material easy to learn and interesting!"</i> ■ <i>"Extremely knowledgeable and was always available when further explanation was required."</i> ■ <i>"Vinicios was very considerate and was never hesitant to help students."</i> ■ <i>"He really cares about students doing well & the course material."</i>
INTERMEDIATE MICRO (TEACHING ASSISTANT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>"Knew the material very well, always come prepared to class. Good at explaining, always make me understand the material better."</i> ■ <i>"He was very good at explaining all the examples and I learned everything from this class by him."</i> ■ <i>"Very interested in the students and responded well to student need in the classroom"</i> ■ <i>"Friendly towards students and explained well"</i> ■ <i>"He is very thorough with the examples"</i> ■ <i>"TA is really caring; explain well"</i> ■ <i>"Great TA"</i>

I am pleased that my students use words such as “*enthusiastic*,” “*engaging*,” and “*passionate*” to describe my teaching skills because that is exactly how I feel about teaching economics. The students seem to understand and appreciate my approach to teaching and communicating with the class: “*The instructor explained difficult theories in an easy way, which is very helpful for us to understand the course materials.*” Moreover, they seem to appreciate the class environment as an “*enjoyable*” and welcoming place for learning: “*He was always very positive & welcomed students to ask questions. So you didn’t have to feel embarrassed if you didn’t understand something.*”

TEACHING EVALUATIONS

My commitment to teaching is evident from the results of my teaching evaluations. As a sole instructor for International Trade, I have been consistently rated as excellent by my students, and I was rated as outstanding twice (evaluation scores in the top 10th percentile). In addition, across the four semesters, I served as a teaching assistant, I was also consistently rated as excellent by my students. The table below summarizes the mean evaluation scores I obtained in each semester. The many comments I have received from students and their overall evaluation scores reinforce my confidence in my teaching approach. The feedback received gives me directions to important ways to keep improving on creating an inclusive and engaging environment to help flourish students’ creativity, academic curiosity, and critical thinking.

TERM	COURSE NUMBER	COURSE TITLE	ROLE	MEAN
Spring 2020**	ECON 490	International Trade	Sole Instructor	4.7
Fall 2019*	ECON 490	International Trade	Sole Instructor	4.6
Spring 2019**	ECON 490	International Trade	Sole Instructor	4.9
Fall 2018*	ECON 490	International Trade	Sole Instructor	4.5
Spring 2018**	ECON 203	Economic Statistics II	Head Teaching Assistant	4.7
Fall 2017*	ECON 203	Economic Statistics II	Teaching Assistant	4.6
Spring 2017*	ECON 203	Economic Statistics II	Teaching Assistant	4.6
Fall 2016	ECON 302	Intermediate Microeconomics	Teaching Assistant	4.6

The numbers represent the average students’ response to the statement: “Rate the instructor’s overall teaching effectiveness”. Ratings range from 1 (exceptionally low) to 5 (exceptionally high).

* Rated as “Excellent” on the Instructor and Course Evaluation (ICES) questionnaire forms (UIUC).

** Rated as “Outstanding” (Top 10%) on ICES forms (UIUC).

TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

Throughout my teaching experience, I have constantly searched for ways to develop my teaching skills and effectiveness. One strategy that I continuously use is collecting student feedback early in the semester. The early feedback allows me to: (i) learn students’ expectations about the course; (ii) identify what is working well in my course; (iii) understand any challenges to my teaching approach. Having this information early in the semester allows me to adjust and improve my teaching methods, improving the quality of the course. For instance, the pandemic brought several challenges for instructors and students due to the transition from in-person to online learning environments. However, I quickly familiarized myself with online platform resources, adapted my lectures, and successfully overcame any issues learned from early feedback received by my students.

I also consistently took advantage of the various resources available for teaching development by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning offers multiple resources to support and encourage faculty, academic professionals, and graduate students to improve their teaching skills and help assess their effectiveness. In 2017, I completed the Graduate Teaching Certificate (Figure 1), designed to graduate teaching assistants who want to develop their teaching skills and reflective practice. To obtain this certificate, a teaching assistant needs to complete a series of requirements that include the observation of teaching by a faculty member, attending teaching development workshops, and reflecting upon the teaching strategies and effectiveness.

GRADUATE TEACHER CERTIFICATE

is hereby awarded to

Vinicios Poloni Sant'Anna

for participating in a pre-semester teaching development program; teaching a minimum of two semesters at Illinois; having an observation of, and reflecting on, your teaching; using informal early feedback and end-of-semester feedback from your students for two semesters; and participating in a minimum of six hours of teaching development workshops.

May 2, 2017


Wojtek J. Chodsko-Zajko, Dean
Graduate College


Michel Bellini, Director
Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning

Figure 1. Graduate Teacher Certificate (2017). The Graduate Teacher Certificate is designed to encourage teaching assistants (TAs) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to develop their teaching skills and reflective practice.