

# Teaching Statement

Yael S. Elmatad

## 1 Teaching Background

One of the selling points of my current position as an NYU Diversity Faculty Fellow/Postdoctoral Fellow was the ability to combine my love of independent research with my sense of teaching responsibility. Over the past few semesters, I have enjoyed my time as the instructor of two required upper level courses: Thermal Physics and Quantum Mechanics I. Throughout my time, I have had to grapple with the pitfalls that often face new faculty such as writing fair examinations and explaining material in a novel way – not to mention dealing with a wide variety of student concerns ranging from questions regarding difficult material to issues concerning personal matters. Designing these courses myself has been challenging but rewarding. In fact, at the end of my first semester review 11 out of the 12 responders said they would recommend me as an instructor to a friend.

Up until my postdoctoral work, my education and teaching experience has been mostly in Chemistry departments. However, my education has always been on the very physical side of chemistry – opting for extra physics, mathematics, and computer science coursework rather than pure chemistry. As a sophomore undergraduate I was already leading general chemistry clinic sections. By Junior year I was one of the two Physical Chemistry teaching assistants, teaching both semesters (Quantum mechanics, statistical mechanics, thermodynamics, gas kinetics, etc...) while still enrolled in a variety of upper level coursework myself.

In graduate school at UC Berkeley, I was a teaching assistant for three semesters. My first semester, I was selected among all the incoming graduate students to teach laboratory portion of the General Chemistry for majors (rather than non majors). I then went on to teach the upper level Physical Chemistry Thermodynamics/Statistical Mechanics course. For my work as a teaching assistant in that course I received a Graduate Student instructor award by the university and received reviews stating that I was the best teaching assistant my students had ever had. My fourth year I was selected to be the teaching assistant for the graduate level statistical mechanics course in the chemistry department.

## 2 Teaching Tools and Philosophy

Throughout my teaching work I have strived to make the material both accessible and relatable. One strategy that I have used is to include modern research into my teaching assignments. In statistical physics, I must go through all the different kinds of Engines – something that seems archaic to most students (and instructors!). However, a recent article in Nature Physics about a one-particle Stirling engine shows how even this mundane topic can be made interesting and is on the cutting edge of scientific discovery. In my Quantum, I class I introduced the Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky paradox, Bell's inequality, and highlighted several papers (all within the past year) on quantum entanglement and quantum communication.

Moreover, as a computational chemical physicist, I know the power of computing in modern science. Students who can harness computational tools are at a deep advantage over those who shy away from it – whether they choose to go into theory or experiment. As a graduate teaching assistant at Berkeley I was charged with introducing my students to the basics of programming (in C++) so they could learn to run simple Monte Carlo simulations. This Spring, I intend to do the same with my undergraduate physics students only this time I will teach them Python, a slightly more modern language.

I believe integrating modern research and techniques (such as computer simulation) makes my courses more enriching to students who realize that what I am teaching them allows them access to some of the most new and modern ways of looking at the world, and not just lip service to the past.

Furthermore, as a woman in science, I believe that it is deeply important to have female role models. As a high school student, my first chemistry teaching was a woman and I believe that had an important impact on my future trajectory. In college (at NYU and UC Berkeley), however, I did not have a single female professor in any of my chemistry, physics, mathematics, or computer science courses. However, I did have a female advisor who pushed me and believed in my success. To that end, I am aware that my ability to express confidence and competence as an instructor has a lasting impact on future generations of scientists. To some, it expresses that they too can be in my shoes, while to others it highlights that people from varied backgrounds are just as capable as anyone else.

### 3 Future

My diverse educational background in physical sciences makes me suitable for teaching a wide variety of courses across several departments. My favorite courses are those close to my research background such as those that deal with Thermodynamics, Statistical Mechanics, and Mathematical Methods. However, my experience and teaching also makes me suitable for a wide variety of other courses such as General Chemistry and Physics, Quantum Mechanics, Biophysics, Condensed Matter, and Classical Mechanics.

Moreover, I would love the opportunity to design new and exciting course work. For example, a course on non equilibrium statistical mechanics and simulation methods that includes cutting edge work on out of equilibrium and dynamical systems such as the Jarzynski inequality and Crooks fluctuation theorems as well as rare event path sampling methods developed to study dynamical processes and slow systems. Additionally, I believe it is important for undergraduate to be exposed to cutting edge research and I believe a course that focuses on reading modern and current literature analytically – that is understanding the material, critiquing it, as well as suggesting future steps in that line of work – would highlight another facet of being a scientist normally excluded from undergraduate education.

### 4 At CUNY

At an undergraduate level I could teach the majority of physics courses for both majors and non majors such as Ideas in Physics, General Physics, Elementary Physics, any of the Honors courses, any of the Quantum Mechanics courses (such as the QM for Applied Engineers), Biophysics, Mechanics I & II, Thermodynamics and Statistical Physics, Kinetic Theory and Statistical Mechanics, The Physics and Chemistry of Materials, The Physical Universe, Science I & II, Development and Analysis of Ideas in Classical Science, as well as Development and Analysis of Ideas in Contemporary Science.

At the graduate level I would be more than comfortable teaching any level of Statistical Mechanics, Quantum Mechanics I, Mathematical Methods in Physics, Computational Methods in Physics, and Biophysics.