Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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As a graduate student at Arizona State University, I have had the opportunity to teach at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and thus develop a diverse set of skills to address the distinct demands of each type of teaching.

At the undergraduate level, I have worked as a sole instructor for Intermediate Macroeconomics, and served as a teaching assistant for Economics of Education and Advanced Honors Macroeconomics. At the graduate level, I served as a teaching assistant for Microeconomic and Macroeconomic Theory, both core courses in the first-year graduate sequence.

Over the last four years I have tried to develop a comprehensive approach to transmitting the ideas and analytical tools of Economics. My central goal has been to train students to think like an Economist: that is, to understand trade-offs, and problems related to the optimal allocation of limited resources. I attempt further to demonstrate to my students that the ideas of Economics can be applied to a variety of issues ranging from conflict analysis to the crafting of fiscal policy.

The first step to achieving these goals is to whet students' curiosity and encourage them to ask questions about things they might otherwise take for granted. The second step is to teach them the tools of economic theory, in particular how to model and formalize economic phenomena. The last step is to help them make connections between the theory, data, and everyday life. These steps are in some ways self-evident, but it is important to address them concretely.

The initial challenge lies in persuading students to care and question. As a new student in my first Economics course, I recall having a preexisting "obvious" explanation for several of the motivating questions proposed in the syllabus: "Why are some countries rich and others poor?," or " Why is there unemployment? " A week into the class, I came to see that answers to these types of questions are far from obvious. I was eager to get answers-especially now that I realized they might be counterintuitive and change my perspective.

This motivated me to engage in classroom activities and discussions, I was able to adjust my understanding of many issues, and finish the course with the sense that my own thinking was fundamentally more nuanced and mature.

Understanding what motivated me early on helps me to motivate my students. I start each lecture by describing a real-world issue, and encourage students to think about why it exists and how to address it. For example, when I talk about GDP and methods of calculating it, I start by asking students whether they think the economy is growing. I encourage them to elaborate on what are they looking for or comparing to when they make this judgment. When students realize that not all of them are using the same metrics for gauging the size of the economy, they understand the necessity of defining a a common conception of size and growth. This motivates them to learn about how to define and calculate GDP.

Once I have motivated the students, the second step is to teach them the theory. Like many large public institutions, Arizona State has a student body heterogeneous in mathematical background, culture, and language skills. The nature of this heterogeneity is different depending on whether the course is at the graduate or undergraduate level, but it is always a factor the instructor must consider. Instruction at Arizona State University requires understanding and balancing the diverse needs of the students in each class.

While teaching Intermediate Macroeconomics, for example, I found that many students grasped the verbal descriptions of economic concepts immediately, but struggled to understand numerical or graphical representations. Some other students were more comfortable with mathematical formality, but found it difficult to explain ideas verbally. Thus, each time that I was teaching a new concept, I circled between verbal, numerical, and graphical illustrations, in order to play to the students' different strengths, and also to convey that an important challenge of Economics is to translate between types of exposition.

Finally, once students have been exposed to theory, it is important to demonstrate how to apply them to real world scenarios. There are several ways to do this. For example, I show my student how to use the National Income and Product Account database in class and then I ask them to download and work with data series as a homework assignment. I also discuss relevant economic news and podcasts to my students. This helps them use their new tools to analyze current economic developments, while also giving them a chance to evaluate and learn from public and popular discourse on economic issues. Demonstrating the application of economic theory to existing data and current events seems to foster a level of understanding and creativity that has made my courses more enjoyable for all the students.

An integral part of teaching lies in developing exercises and giving good feedback and

evaluation. As a sole instructor for Intermediate Macroeconomic course, I had the opportunity to design the curriculum, and decided to incorporate weekly homework as a substantial part of the grade. Homework assignments were such that students learned the concepts both with repetition and by applying them to new, but related, situations. This practice helped students to actually master the details of each topic, and solve problems.

I also encouraged my students to pair each topic with an intuitive and simple takeaway. I often ask my students to try and describe what they have learned to an imaginary audience who knows nothing about economics. This helps them to understand whether or not they themselves have understood the idea well enough to convey it simply.

I have found that approaching teaching in this three-step way, and thinking carefully about the design of exercises and evaluation, has helped me reach my audience of students. I am always on the lookout for ways to augment and update this approach.

As the final note, I should mention that my teaching experiences have enriched my own understanding of Economics. While research demands in-depth expertise in a narrow field, teaching requires a more comprehensive knowledge that requires drawing connections between a number of disparate ideas. Teaching economics inspires me to search for connections between the real-life phenomena and the theories we develop to model it. Often my students draw my attention to ideas or insights that hadn't occurred t me independently. It is rewarding for me to learn along with and from my students.

I am enormously grateful to the professors and mentors who have trained me as an Economist. I look forward to the privilege of being able to play a similar role for other students.