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Teaching Statement

Economics is present all around us, yet students seldom appreciate it unless it is pointed out to them. Once they do, the insight tends to stay with them. This is what first drew me to economics as a student: learning to look at something ordinary, ask a question about it, and reason toward an answer. With the right guidance, students reach that answer on their own and the satisfaction of having done so is what makes the idea last. My philosophy of teaching is built around this experience. I aim to develop in students the curiosity to think critically about the economic forces around them and the willingness to take on unfamiliar or complex material without fear, both within my course and well outside of it.

I believe that almost any concept, however complex, can be reduced to a set of yes-or-no questions. In Econ 2, I use this approach to explain shifts in demand. Suppose you expect surfboard prices to rise next month. Would you buy now or wait? Would your friends behave the same way? If everyone buys now, in which direction does the demand shift today? The same method carries over to graduate finance students learning portfolio choice theory in Econ 233. If I plot every asset on a plane of expected return against risk, do we get a cloud of points? Would you ever buy an asset from inside of that cloud? What about one on its upper edge? If I draw a line from a risk-free asset on the vertical axis that just touches the edge, would you rather hold something on the edge or something on the line? Each question is small enough to answer without hesitation and by the end students have derived the efficient frontier and the capital market line themselves. Students who are reluctant to answer open-ended questions readily respond to a yes-or-no question and having contributed once, they tend to remain engaged.

I also take care that economic intuition never gets lost behind the math. In a quantitative discipline, students can easily get intimidated by formal notation or become so absorbed in the algebra that they lose track of what it means. Students who can derive a first-order condition are often satisfied once the math works out. I ask them to go further and interpret each term: what trade-off it represents and why the condition must hold at the optimum. Students are frequently surprised by how much a single equation conveys, and I encourage them to read subsequent results in the same way.

Where I can, I teach a topic like a story. National income accounting illustrates the value

of this approach. Textbooks typically present it as a set of identities, and many students find it difficult to stay engaged. When I explain that Simon Kuznets built the first national income accounts in the 1930s to measure how far the economy had fallen during the Great Depression, that these numbers informed the New Deal, and that the same accounts later helped plan production during the Second World War, the formulas start to mean something. These sessions generate considerably more questions, as students seek to connect each accounting concept to its historical origins.

My research offers a further point of entry. For most introductory students, utility maximization subject to a budget constraint is the only optimization problem they encounter. I want them to recognize that scarcity, wherever it arises, implies an optimization problem. To illustrate, I present a simplified version of my own work, in which bank credit is a scarce resource and firms must choose between costly domestic bank credit and cheaper foreign debt that exposes them to exchange rate risk. Seeing the logic they just learned applied to an active research question shows students that the tools from their first course are the same ones economists use in practice.

I want students to leave my course with three capabilities. The first is a sound command of the core models, understood well enough to explain the intuition behind a result rather than merely reproduce its derivation. The second is a habit of breaking an unfamiliar problem into smaller questions they can answer, which is the method I model in every class. The third is the ability to see economics in the world around them, so that a new story about interest rates or rising prices reads as a set of incentives and trade-offs that they can reason through. Over the quarter, I want each student to develop confidence in their own reasoning since that matters more once they move on to advanced degrees, in research or careers outside of economics.

A final grade is not, in my view, a complete measure of what a student has learned. Much of my understanding of student progress comes from active learning exercises within a classroom. I regularly ask students to work through a problem in small groups and then walk the class through their reasoning. A wrong answer backed by a promising line of thought is often more informative than a correct one because it reveals exactly where the reasoning breaks down. I take the student back to the point and break it into steps that follow from what they already know so they can fix the mistake themselves. My written feedback on problem sets and examinations follows the same principle. It identifies the first step at which the reasoning went wrong, rather than marking only the final answer.

My students come from a wide range of backgrounds, and face many challenges that are not visible in the classroom. I am committed to ensuring that no student falls behind

because they lack prior training in economics, or because an emergency kept them out of class. Students who miss a session can catch up through recorded lectures, my course notes, and additional office hours. Before each examination, I hold discussion sections beyond my required duties, and students may contact me outside scheduled office hours. A question deserves an answer while the curiosity behind it is fresh, not a week later. The yes-or-no format described above also supports inclusion, since it gives students with no prior exposure to economics a way into the discussion with everyone else. I use cold calling deliberately, directing more accessible questions to those who appear less confident, so that each correct answer is a small win. Over time, they engage with the material voluntarily. Over the years, these practices have substantially increased participation in my classes.

I regard teaching, like research, as a process that improves through feedback. Each student needs something a little different from a teacher, yet the whole class gains when I act on the suggestions of a single student. End-of-term evaluations help me, but they do little for the students who write them, so I also invite students after class to tell me how I can improve their learning. I have also completed a certificate course in Active Learning in Economics, which informs the collaborative problem solving described above. My methods will continue to evolve as I learn from my students, but my objective remains constant: to inculcate curiosity about the economics around them and the drive to seek answers themselves.