Teaching Statement

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In developing my style of teaching over the past 7 years, I have found that clear expectations help students prepare and thrive. To implement my philosophy, I prepare comprehensive syllabi and lead class discussion at the beginning of the semester to highlight both my expectations of the students as well as what they can expect of me. As a PhD student in University of Pittsburgh, I have been an instructor for Introduction to Macroeconomic Theory. I have also served as a teaching assistant for a broad variety of courses in both economics and finance for undergraduate and graduate students, including Introduction to Microeconomics and Macroeconomics, Advanced Microeconomics and Econometrics, Game Theory, Financial Engineering, and Spreadsheet Modelling. These experiences helped dynamically improve my teaching ability and develop my teaching philosophy.

My effort in improving my teaching ability is evident from the results of my teaching evaluations. I have consistently increasing evaluation scores both as an instructor and a teaching assistant. I have been an instructor twice and my overall teaching effectiveness score has increased from 4.28 to 4.54 on a 5-point scale. I have served as a teaching assistant in University of Pittsburgh for 5 semesters and my overall teaching effectiveness score has increased from 3.71 to 4.61, trending upwards.

I believe a comfortable class environment is critical for students to do well in the course. Both communication among students and communication between students and me play important roles. To create an environment conducive to learning among students, I frequently pair them up or divide them into random groups to work on active learning problems and participate in class discussion of open questions, and I prefer walk around during the process. I have also developed many ways to create a comfortable and relaxed environment and stimulate the communication between my students and myself. Before the first class of each course, I always print out the class roster of my students with photographs, learn to pronounce their names correctly, and try to remember their names and faces. During the first class, I encourage them to introduce themselves to their classmates about their background, field of interest, and expectations about the course. They get to know each other quickly in this way, and I could also have an idea about their math skill, familiarity of graphs, background information of economics, etc. to help me make adjustments of my class material in time. I prefer sharing stories in my daily life related to economics with my students, and sometimes I also talk about my research in an easily understandable way to get them more interested in economics research. I usually arrive a bit earlier before class and spend some time chatting with my students. I feel they are relaxed in those talks and happy to share their comments, suggestions and concerns about the course with me. And to better ensure that everyone is taken good care of, I keep telling my students that I am always ready for help, and they could drop by my office anytime when I am available, besides the official office hours. And I always reply to their emails as fast as I can.

Given lectures, my teaching style is a combination of chalk-and-talk and slides. I think this is an efficient way to utilize the lecture time as well as keep students well engaged in the course material. I always prepare slides myself for every lecture and distribute them to my students before each class. In the slides, I include important concepts, formulas, examples, and outlines of the lecture. Students could get well prepared before class and do not need to copy everything down in a hurry

during class. On the whiteboard, I draw graphs of the models, go through math derivations, and solve numerical problems step by step. Students could then follow me and take note beside the slides. This helps them understand the materials thoroughly. I also include a lot of real data figures such as historical real interest rate vs. nominal interest rate, CPI vs. GDP deflator, unemployment rate vs. natural rate of unemployment, etc. in the slides to give my students a better understanding of what happens in the real economy.

I keep learning and improving from the feedbacks I have received from my students. The main suggestion my students gave me after my first teaching experience as an instructor was to engage them more. Therefore, I talked to my colleagues for their experiences and participated in a voluntary teaching workshop about methods encouraging in-class participation. Second time being an instructor, I refined the schedule and the materials in order to insert a lot of active learning stuff in my lectures to "break the pace". For example, I taught them step by step how to get access to the FRED data, which gave them a tool to explore the real economy by themselves. I displayed the photo I took for the copper bull on Wall Street when I introduced the financial markets, and showed them the news of Zimbabwe when talked about hyperinflation. I have also included many active learning questions in the lectures to lead them self-thinking and group discussion. For the topic related to economic growth, I displayed two TED talks showing two opposite perspectives. One from Robert Gordon who is pessimistic about the future of economic growth and the other from Erik Brynjolfsson who is much more optimistic. Then I lead a class discussion to let my students share their opinions with others. When I try to derive the supply and demand curve in my class, I brought a pack of MARS chocolate (and this served as refreshments for my students during break from then on) and asked them "what is the highest price you would like to pay for this candy" and "what is the lowest price you would like to sell if you were a seller" respectively. They participated actively and their answers varied a lot (from 0 to $10), and I derived the supply and demand diagram specifically for this small economy. This gave them a straightforward understanding of the class material. I believe those efforts have pushed my overall teaching evaluation scores up for being an instructor.

I have significant experience in teaching both Introduction to Macroeconomics and Microeconomics. I'm also well equipped to teach advanced econometrics, game theory, and class related to finance topics. Within my field, I would be especially interested in teaching industrial organization and labor economics. In closing, I was nominated to compete for the 2017 Elizabeth Baranger Excellence in Teaching Award when first time being a teaching assistant in University of Pittsburgh. I feel so encouraged and have spent many efforts improving my teaching ability. I have participated in several teaching workshops that introduce new teaching technology in class and how to scale up to larger settings. I believe I will do a better job in the future, and I really enjoy sharing my knowledge and experience with more and more students.