Teaching Statement

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My passion for teaching was sparked early in high school when I started to tutor fellow students in math, Latin, and English. Since then, I have developed my teaching style as a teaching assistant in many economics classes at the University of Mannheim and the University of Chicago, in particular in microeconomics and econometrics. While I have not lectured an entire course yet, I have often finished lecture topics in the TA session and sometimes took over the lecture when the professor was indisposed.

Although it can be exhausting, I have found teaching to be an intensely rewarding experience in my academic life: The joy of comprehension displayed by students when I help them to understand problems that they were confused about or have been struggling with for a long time makes more than up for the extensive effort that high quality teaching requires. Moreover, my experience is that teaching and research are complementary processes. The process of preparing and teaching material deepens my own understanding and inspires me to ask new questions, and so do innovative and unusual responses of curious and engaging students that are exposed to a particular topic for the first time.

From my own experience, there is not one but a number of successful teaching styles. However, I consider the following aspects to be at the core of my own teaching philosophy:

1. **Intensive Preparation.** Detailed preparation is a prerequisite for a successful lecture. As a teacher, I need to understand the material a lot better than I would ever expect my students to know it. Getting confused at crucial moments in my lecture is not only utterly embarrassing but can have a long term impact on the students’ understanding who see the material for the first time. In my experience, teaching a set of materials is a far more complex process than learning it. When preparing a lecture or TA session I try to put myself into a student’s shoes who has never seen the material before. This is not always easy since some concepts have become so hard-wired in my mind that in the beginning, I tended to overlook that they were new to my students and making some crucial connections in one’s head was not as natural as I thought.

2. **Pace and Interaction.** As a teacher, one is often tempted to rush ahead to cover all the material one deems important. In my experience, this strategy typically backfires as one loses students early on in the lecture and gets very little across as a result. I found it important to temper and control my pace, to keep eye-contact with my students to realize when they get
confused, to ask questions that check the students’ understanding, and to encourage them to
ask questions and think ahead. When the material is new and complex, I find it important
to remind students about the overall goal of an ongoing exercise and the crucial steps that
are involved. Otherwise, students easily miss the forest for the trees. Outlining the plan of
the lecture or TA session at the beginning and a brief summary of the main takeaways at
the end also makes it easier for students to keep track.

3. **Connecting Intuition, Examples and Math.** Math is an important tool for economists,
but it is a means, not an end. As a student, I always found it helpful if the professor provided
real world examples and intuitive interpretations of mathematical expressions and results.
Similarly, math sometimes helps to clarify intuition. As a teacher, I try to connect economic
intuition, mathematical results and real world examples whenever possible.

4. **Accessibility.** I want my students to know that I am not hiding in my office when I am
not teaching. That said, I do encourage my students to work in groups and to first try to
clarify questions within the group. In my own experience, this resolves most questions and
helps everyone in the group. However, if problems remain unresolved, I want my students to
know that I am accessible by e-mail and in person.

5. **Practice Material.** Even the best lecture cannot replace the process of search and discovery
associated with solving problems on your own and in small groups. Therefore, I consider
problem sets an important complementary tool to the lecture. Ideally, these problems are a
mixture of standard problems that make sure that students successfully master the course
material and challenging problems that inspire students to think beyond the material covered
in the lecture. In one of my first year Ph.D. courses in microeconomics, we had weekly
problem sets that only very loosely defined a problem and a set of questions to explore.
Our task was to develop the problem ourselves to address the questions and to defend our
assumptions and modeling decisions. I found this experience incredibly helpful for generating
research ideas and thinking of ways to address them.

6. **Lecture Notes.** No matter how much I try to follow all the aspects of my teaching philos-
ophy outlined above, I fail in some respect from time to time—a mistake at the board that
no one catches at the time, an ambiguous statement, a false reference. In my experience,
providing clear and concise lecture notes often helps to make up for such mistakes, and I find
myself confirmed by the feedback I get from students. Good lecture notes do not have to
be incredibly detailed—students learn from solving intermediate steps themselves—but they
should clearly state the crucial steps students are expected to understand and illustrate the
overarching principles of the lecture.

I look forward to refine my teaching style further and to meet new and engaging students.