David Burk
Teaching Statement

Teaching Background
As a graduate student, I taught two terms of undergraduate econometrics, and was responsible for every aspect of the course. In addition, I have served as a teaching assistant for a variety of other courses at the undergraduate and MBA level, including environmental, public, and introductory economics. I have substantial coursework experience and interest in industrial organization and law and economics, and feel I could offer courses in those fields. Also, I could offer advanced courses and seminars in labor, human capital, education, public economics, and econometrics.

Teaching Philosophy and Style
I help my students encounter new concepts from different perspectives. Roughly adhering to “three times to make it stick,” I carefully plan readings, lectures, and problem sets that complement each other.

Readings allow students to learn at their own pace—ideal for important technical details that are not well-suited to chalkboard presentation. Personally, I have always learned best through reading, so I am especially careful to choose and indicate required readings. If the textbook or readings on the syllabus have a weak presentation of a topic, I provide and distribute original typed notes. For each lecture I give, I create a “lecture highlights handout,” that reviews the topics discussed that day. For every problem on an exam, I can point to the corresponding required readings. There is no question in my course about what material is more or less important.

In lectures, I do not merely parrot the material in the readings. My emphasis is on making connections to previously covered material, and applying the theory or methods of the course to applications of interest to the students. Lectures are an opportunity to generate enthusiasm for the course topic. I ask questions that engage the students. I am upfront that the purpose of my lectures is to add value, and if the students don’t benefit from my lectures they need not attend. This system provides a useful check on the quality of my lectures: if students are not attending, then my lectures are not adding value and I need to adjust.

I carefully construct problem sets. A problem set provides the opportunity to have students think hard, without the time pressure of an exam. While I sometimes select problems from a textbook, I typically write my own problems. While it takes time, it allows me to tailor the emphasis of the assignment. Also, it encourages my students to wrestle with the problems, rather than looking up answers online or in the “fraternity library.” I sometimes compare problems from similar courses (either at my school or other schools), to ensure that my students are learning at the level of other similar classes.

Sometimes three exposures is not enough to understand a concept, so I ensure there are numerous opportunities to discuss the material with me or with a TA. I have observed that students mysteriously become much more eager about the material in the days prior to exam. I
schedule extra office hours those days. In the week prior to an exam, I hold a review session tailored for those who feel behind in class.

Regarding classroom manner, I have observed that undergraduates are more engaged in lecture and thus learn better when their instructor is interactive and relatable. Of course, the ideal is that the material being presented is sufficient to captivate students’ attention, but I have found they often need help, particularly in required courses. I take time from the first day to learn names, engage the class, and periodically share some information about myself. Also I will take a moment to discuss economics in the news or in “real life,” even if it does not directly relate to the day’s lecture. I find that these practices make students more comfortable with me and with each other, and thus more likely to contribute by asking questions or offering answers. They listen more. I have more fun, too.

In case they are of interest, appended to this statement are summaries of teaching evaluations from the two courses of econometrics that I taught.

**Brief Description of a Class Outside of Core Research Area**

Obviously I feel qualified to teach courses on topics I research, but I also am qualified to teach other courses in public finance, law and economics, and industrial organization. As an example, I will briefly describe an industrial organization seminar “Introduction to Auctions” that I would like to teach.

Current theoretical and empirical research in auctions is characterized by involved theory and econometrics, however an introduction to auction theory could be presented to advanced undergraduates comfortable with microeconomic theory, calculus, econometrics, statistics, and basic computer programming. Indeed, the course would be an ideal way to introduce students to structural modelling and structural econometrics.

We would begin by developing the theory of a first-price auction with risk-neutral participants, and solve for the optimal bidding strategy. Then we would add risk-aversion. We would go on to consider other simple types of auctions. We would start the empirical portion of the course by analyzing simply constructed empirical examples, and gradually develop the mathematical and computational tools to understand a relatively accessible auction paper such as Asker’s “A Study of the Internal Organization of a Bidding Cartel” (AER, June 2010) which studies the effects of collusion in a bidding ring of stamp dealers. Throughout the course, I would help individual students to prepare auction case studies or high-level overviews of important developments in auction research, which they could present to the class.
Course Evaluation Summary for Lecturer: Burk, David

Quarter: Winter Quarter 2014
Course: Econometrics (Econ 21000)

Student enrolled: 48
Student evaluations: 22

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1 = not at all  5 = a great deal

Selected Comments:
1. One of the best econ professors/grad student teachers I have ever had so far at uchicago.
2. David is awesome. Extremely nice guy and a fantastic teacher. He really wants to help students. He is without a doubt one of the most reasonable yet challenging professors I have had at the university.
3. David is by far the best instructor I have ever had at this university. Honestly, metrics isn't something anyone in the major looks forward to, but I learned so much and enjoyed doing so.
4. He’s possibly the best instructor I’ve had at this university. Put a lot of time and into this class, way more than most professors. He made sure that we could have office hours with an instructor every day of the week and responded promptly to emails.
5. David Burk is an amazing teacher. He not only attempted to instill a genuine understanding of econometrics into his students, he also attempted to instill a genuine interest as well. He was both approachable and competent as a professor.
6. David Burk baked us chocolate chip cookies for our final exam. That about sums it up. But he was a wonderful instructor and cared so much in not only answering all our questions, but also providing us with extensive review and practice material, and in trying to make metrics lectures as fun and as enjoyable as possible.

Prepared by: Robert Herbst - November 20, 2014
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The University of Chicago  
Department of Economics  
Undergraduate Program

Course Evaluation Summary for Lecturer: Burk, David

Quarter: Autumn Quarter 2011  
Course: Econometrics (Econ 21000)

Student enrolled: 30  
Student evaluations: 22

Rating

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Selected Comments:
1. David is great! He's so funny and chill, he somehow made metrics a class I actively wanted to attend.
2. Burk was a really nice guy and you could tell he cared a lot about the students doing well.
3. David was very enthusiastic and motivated students to be interested in learning the material by providing lots of insights and intuition.
4. Dave is really committed to teaching. He really wants people to like metrics and understand it and goes out of his way to make that happen.
5. David Burk is such a great professor. Right from the get-go, he had a big smile on his face and he maintained it through each of the 20 lectures.
6. David has a way of making the class feel at ease with material that is mathematically/statistically involved.
7. Dave was a great teacher. I was worried about taking this class but he was an unbelievable professor and made it fun.
8. David Burke is one of the best teachers here at the school. Made my experience with one of the most difficult subjects in the Econ major interesting, engaging and even funny.
9. Dave is fantastic. He actually cares about his students. What's that? Are you the most annoying kid on the face of the planet? Doesn't matter. David Burk will care about you and your blossoming appreciation for econometrics.
10. Professor Burk was FANTASTIC. I have always been afraid to tackle on the dreaded Econometrics course, but although the material was difficult, Professor Burk was somehow able to organize and present it in a very clear way. Moreover, his energy, sense of humor, and enthusiasm made this one of the most enjoyable economics courses I have taken at this school, which very few students can say about Econometrics.

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